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The works of the right
reverend father in God,

THE

WORKS

OF THE

RIGHT REVEREND FATHER IN GOD,

THOMAS WILSON, D.D.,

LORD BISHOP OF SODOR AND MAN.

VOL. III.

SERMONS LI. TO XCIX.

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PRINCETON THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY.

CONTENTS.

SERMON LI.

(Page 1.)

The duty of magistrates.

Deut. i. 17.

Ye shall not be afraid of the face of man; for the judgment is God's.

SERMON LII.

(Page 9.)

The temptations that lead to theft and robbery considered, with the means of preventing these crimes.

Exodus xx. 15.

Thou shalt not steal.

SERMON LIII.

(Page 16.)

Of fraud.

Gen. xliii. 12.

And take double money in your hand; and the money that was brought again in the mouth of your sacks, carry it again in your hand; peradventure it was an oversight.

SERMON LIV.

(Page 26.)

The nature of sin, and the punishment that certainly follows it.

Numb. xxxii. 23.

Behold, ye have sinned against the Lord: and be sure your sin will find you out.

SERMON LV.

(Page 37.)

Fornication forbidden both in the law and in the Gospel.

Ephes. v. 3—5.

But fornication, and all uncleanness, or covetousness, let it not be once named amongst you, as becometh saints: [that is, *Christians:*] *neither filthiness, nor foolish talking, nor jesting, which are not convenient: but rather giving of thanks. For this ye know, that no whoremonger, nor unclean person, nor covetous man who is an idolater, hath any inheritance in the kingdom of Christ, and of God.*

SERMON LVI.

(Page 48.)

The causes and the remedies of men's neglecting the care of their salvation.

Luke xiii. 8, 9.

Lord, let it alone this year also, till I shall dig about it, and dung it: and if it bear fruit, well; and if not, then after that thou shalt cut it down.

SERMON LVII.

(Page 59.)

The true Christian method of educating the children both of the rich and the poor.

Acts xiii. 48.

As many as were ordained to [that is, *disposed or prepared for*] *eternal life, believed.*

SERMON LVIII.

(Page 77.)

On the due observance of the Sabbath.

Exodus xx. 11.

The Lord blessed the Sabbath-day, and hallowed it.

SERMON LIX.

(Page 87.)

The sin and danger of shutting our eyes against the light of the Gospel.

John iii. 19—21.

And this is the condemnation, that light is come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil. For every one that doeth evil hateth the light, neither cometh to the light, lest his deeds should be reproved. But he that doeth truth cometh to the light, that his deeds may be made manifest, that they are wrought in God.

SERMON LX.

(Page 98.)

The great indignation of God against sinners.

Deut. xxix. 18—20.

Lest there should be among you man or woman, or family or tribe, whose heart turneth away this day from the Lord our God, to go and serve the gods of these nations: lest there should be among you a root that beareth gall and wormwood; and it come to pass, when he heareth the words of this curse, that he bless himself in his heart, saying, I shall have peace, though I walk in the imagination of mine heart, to add drunkenness to thirst. The Lord will not spare him, but then the anger of the Lord and his jealousy shall smoke against that man, and all the curses that are written in this Book shall lie upon him, and the Lord shall blot out his name from under heaven.

SERMON LXI.

(Page 109.)

Of Christ's second coming to judge the world.

Rev. xxii. 12.

And behold, I come quickly; and My reward is with Me; to give to every man according as his work shall be.

SERMON LXII.

(Page 120.)

The duty of self-denial.

1 Cor. xv. 32, 33.

Let us eat and drink, for to-morrow we die. Be not deceived: evil communications corrupt good manners.

SERMON LXIII.

(Page 131.)

The mistakes of Christians concerning repentance.

Acts iii. 19.

Repent ye therefore, and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out.

SERMON LXIV.

(Page 139.)

The causes of impenitency; and what it is which hinders our conversion.

Heb. xii. 1, 2.

Let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which does so easily beset us; and let us run with patience the race that is set before us, looking unto Jesus, the author (or *beginner*) *and finisher of our faith; who, for the joy that was set before Him, endured the cross, despising the shame, and is set down at the right hand of the throne of God.*

SERMON LXV.

(Page 147.)

The sufferings and death of Christ practically explained and applied.

1 Cor. ii. 2.

I determined not to know anything among you, save Jesus Christ, and Him crucified.

SERMON LXVI.

(Page 158.)

The sufferings and death of Christ necessary for the salvation of the world.

Luke xxiv. 46.

Thus it is written, and thus it behoved Christ to suffer, and to rise from the dead the third day.

SERMON LXVII.

(Page 169.)

The sin of Judas practically explained and applied.

Luke xxii. 21.

Behold, the hand of him that betrayeth Me is with Me on the table.

SERMON LXVIII.

(Page 181.)

A distinct part of the history of our Saviour's resurrection practically considered and applied.

Matt. xxviii. 11—15.

Now when they were going, behold, some of the watch came into the city, and shewed unto the chief priests all the things that were done. And when they were assembled with the elders, and had taken counsel, they gave large money unto the soldiers, &c.

SERMON LXIX.

(Page 191.)

The deliverance of the children of Israel from their bondage in Egypt, a type of the redemption of the world by Jesus Christ.

Exod. xii. 26, 27.

And it shall come to pass, when your children shall say unto you, What mean you by this service? that ye shall say, It is the sacrifice of the Lord's Passover, who passed over the houses of the children of Israel in Egypt, when He smote the Egyptians, and delivered our houses.

SERMON LXX.

(Page 204.)

The resurrection of Jesus Christ of the greatest importance to mankind.

Acts i. 21, 22.

Wherefore of these men which have companied with us all the time that the Lord Jesus went in and out among us, [that is, *during the time of His ministry,*] *beginning from the baptism of John, unto that same day when He was taken up from us, must one be ordained to be a witness with us of His resurrection.*

SERMON LXXI.

(Page 213.)

The knowledge and belief of the resurrection of Jesus Christ a necessary encouragement to forsake sin.

Ephes. ii. 4, 5.

But God, who is rich in mercy, for His great love wherewith He loved us, even when we were dead in sins, hath quickened us together with Christ, &c.

SERMON LXXII.

(Page 224.)

The faith of Abraham illustrated, and practically applied.

Heb. xi. 8.

By faith Abraham, when he was called to go out into a place which he should after receive for an inheritance, obeyed; and he went out, not knowing whither he went.

SERMON LXXIII.

(Page 237.)

The influence which Christ's ascension ought to have on the lives of Christians.

Matt. vi. 21.

Where your treasure is, there will your heart be also.

SERMON LXXIV.

(Page 251.)

The mercy of God in sending the Holy Ghost to convert the world, and to remain with His Church for ever.

John xvi. 7.

I tell you the truth; it is expedient for you that I go away: for if I go not away, the Comforter will not come unto you; but if I depart, I will send Him unto you.

SERMON LXXV.

(Page 264.)

The Lord's Supper the medicine of the soul.

Mark vi. 56.

As many as touched Him were made whole.

SERMON LXXVI.

(Page 273.)

The Lord's Supper practically explained.

Luke xxii. 19.

This do in remembrance of Me.

SERMON LXXVII.

(Page 288.)

A frequent receiving of the Lord's Supper recommended and enforced.

1 Cor. xi. 26.

For as often as ye eat this bread, and drink this cup, ye do shew the Lord's death till He come.

SERMON LXXVIII.

(Page 303.)

God's goodness to men the foundation of the love they ought to have for Him, and for His sake, for their neighbour.

Luke vii. 41—48.

... Wherefore I say unto thee, Her sins, which are many, are forgiven; for she loved much: but to whom little is forgiven, the same loveth little. And He said unto her, Thy sins are forgiven.

SERMON LXXIX.

(Page 316.)

The advantages arising from the Christian education of poor children, especially of poor girls.

2 Tim. i. 4, 5.

... That I may be filled with joy, when I call to remembrance the unfeigned faith that is in thee, which dwelt first in thy grandmother Lois, and thy mother Eunice; and I am persuaded that in thee also.

SERMON LXXX.

(Page 326.)

Continuance in well-doing recommended and enforced.

Gal. vi. 9.

Let us not be weary in well-doing: for in due season we shall reap, if we faint not.

SERMON LXXXI.

(Page 338.)

The ordinances of God attended with certain, though invisible effects.

John iii. 7, 8.

Marvel not that I said unto thee, Ye must be born again. The wind bloweth where it listeth, and thou hearest the sound thereof, but canst not tell whence it cometh, and whither it goeth: so is every one that is born of the Spirit.

SERMON LXXXII.

(Page 347.)

The danger of living, like children, at all adventures, without thought, or reason, or fear, or steadiness.

1 Cor. xiii. 11.

When I was a child, I spake as a child, I understood as a child, I thought as a child: but when I became a man, I put away childish things.

SERMON LXXXIII.

(Page 357.)

The knowledge necessary for every one who takes upon himself the profession of a Christian pointed out and illustrated.

Luke xiv. 28—30.

For which of you, intending to build a tower, sitteth not down first, and counteth the cost, whether he have sufficient to finish it? Lest haply, after he hath laid the foundation, and is not able to finish it, &c.

SERMON LXXXIV.

(Page 369.)

The instruction of children in the knowledge and fear of God one great part of the duty of parents.

Deut. vi. 6, 7.

These words which I command thee this day shall be in thine heart; and thou shalt teach them diligently unto thy children.

SERMON LXXXV.

(Page 380.)

The folly and danger of expecting the blessings of Christianity without leading a Christian life.

Ephes. iv. 17.

This I say therefore, and testify in the Lord, that ye henceforth walk not as other gentiles walk, in the vanity of their mind; [that is, following their own wicked inclinations.]

SERMON LXXXVI.

(Page 389.)

The sin and danger of grieving the Holy Spirit of God.

Ephes. iv. 30.

And grieve not the Holy Spirit of God, whereby ye are sealed unto the day of redemption.

SERMON LXXXVII.

(Page 403.)

Our Saviour's concern for the common people, a pattern for His followers, and especially for ministers of the Gospel.

Matt. ix. 36—38.

But when He saw the multitudes, He was moved with compassion on them, because they fainted, and were scattered abroad, as sheep having no shepherd, &c.

SERMON LXXXVIII.

(Page 412.)

The great blessing of a standing ministry.

Numb. vi. 22—27.

And the Lord spake unto Moses, saying, Speak unto Aaron and unto his sons, saying, on this wise ye shall bless the children of Israel, saying unto them, The Lord bless thee, and keep thee: the Lord make His face shine upon thee, and be gracious unto thee: the Lord lift up His countenance upon thee, and give thee peace. And they shall put My name upon the children of Israel, and I will bless them.

SERMON LXXXIX.

(Page 425.)

Reciprocal obligations of Christian ministers and their people.

Heb. xiii. 17.

They watch for your souls, as they that must give account.

SERMON XC.

(Page 434.)

The duties of ministers and people.

1 Cor. iv. 1.

Let a man so account of us as of the ministers of Christ, and stewards of the mysteries of God. Moreover it is required in stewards, that a man be found faithful.

SERMON XCI.

(Page 443.)

At the dedication of the new Church in Kirk Lonan. March 25, 1735.

2 Chron. vi. 40.

We have in the prayer of King Solomon, at the dedication of the Temple, these words:—*My God! I beseech Thee, let Thine eyes be open, and let Thine ears be attent unto the prayer that is made in this place.*

2 Chron. vii. 15.

We have the gracious answer and promise of God to this petition, in these words:—*Mine eyes shall be open, and Mine ears attent unto the prayer that is made in this place.*

SERMON XCII.

(Page 454.)

At the consecration of Douglass Chapel.

Exod. xx. 24.

In all places where I record My name, I will come unto thee, and I will bless thee.

SERMON XCIII.

(Page 467.)

The power of God's ministers to rebuke sinners, and receive them on repentance.

Josh. vii. 19, 20.

And Joshua said unto Achan, My son, give, I pray thee, glory to the Lord God of Israel, and make confession unto Him; and tell me now what thou hast done; hide it not from me. And Achan answered Joshua, and said, Indeed I have sinned against the Lord God of Israel, and thus and thus have I done.

SERMON XCIV.

(Page 480.)

The consideration of death put into practice.

2 Kings xx. 1.

Thus saith the Lord, Set thine house in order, for thou shalt die, and not live.

SERMON XCV.

(Page 493.)

The happiness of those who die in the faith and favour of God.

Rev. xiv. 13.

I heard a voice from heaven, saying unto me, Write, Blessed are the dead which die in the Lord, from henceforth: Yea, saith the Spirit, that they may rest from their labours; and their works do follow them.

SERMON XCVI.

(Page 502.)

The happiness of those who die in the faith and favour of God.

Rev. xiv. 13.

Blessed are the dead which die in the Lord, &c.

SERMON XCVII.

(Page 512.)

The true foundation of comfort on the death of friends.

1 Thess. iv. 13, 14.

I would not have you to be ignorant, brethren, concerning them which are asleep, that ye sorrow not, even as others which have no hope. For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so them also which sleep in Jesus (that is, in the faith of Jesus) *will God bring with Him.*

SERMON XCVIII.

(Page 522.)

The proper duty of Christians in general, and of the ministers of Christ in particular.

John xvii. 4.

I have finished the work which Thou gavest Me to do.

SERMON XCIX.

(Page 534.)

St. Paul's comfort in the prospect of death applicable to every faithful minister of Christ.

Phil. i. 21.

For to me to live is Christ; and to die is gain.

PROPERTY OF PRINCETON THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY

SERMON LI.

BEFORE THE COURT OF TINWALD, 1725.

THE DUTY OF MAGISTRATES.

DEUT. i. 17.

Ye shall not be afraid of the face of man: for the judgment is God's.

See Exod. 18. 21; 23. 3; Deut. 1. 16; Prov. 16. 12; 21. 30. Isaiah 29. 21; 30. 1. Amos 5. 10; Gal. 1. 10; 1 Tim. 2. 2. 2 Chron. 19. 6, 7.

THIS is part of that *solemn charge* which Moses gave to the judges of Israel. The same in effect did good King Jehosaphat give to his judges; "Take heed what ye do: for ye judge not for man, but for the Lord, who is with you in the judgment; wherefore, let the fear of the Lord be upon you."

If this charge was necessary *then*, it certainly is so *now*, and will ever be so, as long as men are subject to *weakness*, to *negligence*, to *corruption*, or to *passion*; that is, as long as this world lasts.

The words of the text suppose this, *Ye shall not be afraid of the face of man;* and proposes the only effectual antidote against such an evil, *for the judgment is God's.*

The words are few, but imply a great deal of instruction.

First; THE JUDGMENT IS GOD'S. Why then, *the magistrate's power and authority is from God.*

Secondly; YE SHALL NOT BE AFRAID OF THE FACE OF MAN. This teaches the magistrate *his* duty; namely, that he is not to pervert justice for any worldly consideration; no, not for the fear of death.

Thirdly; the subject may here see the sin and danger of *opposing*, of *disobeying*, of *vilifying*, the magistrate in the due execution of his office. He is God's minister; his judg-

SERM. LI.

ment, if just, is the very judgment which God would give; God is with him in the judgment, and will certainly avenge him if he is despised.

And these are the things that I would, at this time, recommend to your consideration, in as few words as I can possibly express my meaning.

And first, for *the authority of the magistrate.* St. Paul
Rom. 13. 1. tells us plainly, "the powers that be are ordained of God." They are, it is true, *men of like passions with ourselves;* but that does not hinder them from being God's representatives.
Rom. 13. 6. They are expressly called in Holy Scripture, GOD'S MINIS-
Prov. 8. 15, 16. TERS. "By me," saith Solomon, "by me kings reign, and all the judges of the earth;" that is, from God they have
[Rom. 13. 2.] their power. "He, therefore, that resisteth, resisteth not man, but God."

And this is the magistrate's great security, especially amongst Christians, who all know, or should know, that disobedience to the lawful commands of a lawful magistrate will be attended with the severest punishment. For "they that resist," saith the Apostle, "shall receive to themselves damnation."

In short; God, the author of life and death, the great proprietor of all things, has given to certain persons power over the *bodies, goods, estates,* and even *lives,* of their fellow-creatures; but then, lest these magistrates, finding themselves vested with so much power, should be tempted to abuse it, all nations, after the example of God's people, and by His will, have agreed upon laws to restrain and direct them.

And most nations, particularly this of ours, have made the law of God, by Moses to the Israelites, their pattern.

Now, if the magistrate judge and govern according to these laws, that is God's will and judgment; so that both the magistrate and people are answerable to God; the one, if he makes not the law his rule, and the other, if they live not in all dutiful obedience to those whom the providence of God has set over them.

And therefore the Apostle adds, that we must obey authority—not only for *wrath,* that is, for fear of temporal punishment; but also for *conscience sake;* that is, out of regard to the law and will of God.

And happy it is, both for the magistrate and the people, that there are such laws in every society, that both the one and the other may have a rule to go by, a rule which does or should always speak the same language—to the *poor* and to the *rich;* to *friends* and *enemies;* to those that are *wise,* and to them that are *simple* and see not their interest.

It was for this reason, that the heathens represented justice with a veil over her face, intimating that a righteous judge ought never to consider the *person,* but the *cause,* that is before him.

And certainly there is no better way for a magistrate to secure the obedience and regard of the people, than to let them see, that they who are appointed to *give the law,* are themselves governed by *law,* and not by their own inclinations or wills. For the laws of all nations do suppose, that magistrates may be mistaken in their judgment, either through fear or favour, or negligence, or ignorance, or through weakness, or corruption; and therefore all laws have, as far as it is in the power of man, provided a remedy against such evils, by allowing an appeal from every *inferior* to a *superior* court.

St. Paul himself, than whom no inspired writer ever pressed obedience to government more earnestly, when he was most unjustly prosecuted for a faithful discharge of his duty to God, *he appealed unto Cæsar,* as to the last power, and next under God, from whom he might expect a more equitable sentence. [Acts 25. 11.]

Let us now consider, *the ends for which magistrates have this great power* given them by God. And these are, in short, *the glory of God,* and *the good of their fellow-creatures.*

It is for this reason, that in our daily prayers we beseech God, so to dispose and govern the hearts of such as are in authority, that they, knowing whose ministers they are, may above all things, and in the first place, seek God's honour and glory; and in the next place, study to preserve the people under them in wealth, peace, and godliness. And every magistrate, that has not these things in his view, will have but a sad account to make to God, whose minister he is.

It is certain, all our laws were intended to secure these two ends; THE HONOUR OF GOD, by punishing the breach of

SERM. LI.

His laws, by penalties suitable to the nature of the offence; and THE GOOD OF EVERY MAN, by securing every man in the possession of his rights, till a better right appeared.

I wish one could say the same of all our precedents; but the reason of the difference is very plain:—*laws* are generally made with good advice, and with a view to the public good; but *precedents* are too often made with a view to particular interests, and sometimes by men of weak judgments; so that the reproach cast upon the commonwealth of Athens may too fitly be applied to other nations; namely, that their great wisdom appeared in their excellent laws, and their folly in taking pains to pervert them.

To prevent this, the kings and lords of this Isle first instituted THIS COURT OF TINWALD, that all inferior magistrates might have an opportunity of justifying their conduct, if they had acted uprightly, and agreeably to law, and might receive a just rebuke, if complaint were made that they had acted otherwise.

And this is exactly agreeable to an ordinance of the ancient Romans, which made that commonwealth so prosperous: for, to prevent carelessness, corruption, or negligence, in the interpretation or execution of the laws, the judges were obliged to lay their acts before the censors, that nothing might remain on record, but what the law should warrant.

A very excellent method, every body must own; and yet every Christian magistrate has much stronger obligations upon him, to be most exactly careful in the administration of justice:—*ye judge not for man,* neither for his approbation, nor for fear of his censure, *but for the Lord.* The JUDGMENT IS GOD'S, saith the text; that is, it ought to be the very same judgment, if possible, that God Himself would give. At least, a good magistrate must have this testimony of his integrity, that he honestly intend to give a judgment worthy of God, in whose place he stands;—a judgment which he hopes God will approve of, and which his conscience will never reprove him for.

That it may be so, it is necessary, that every magistrate should not only, as in Jehosaphat's charge, *take heed what he does;* that is, be very careful to inform himself what is the

law, and what is the case concerning which he is to give judgment; but it is also necessary, that he let no worldly consideration take possession of his heart. The text saith, YE SHALL NOT BE AFRAID OF THE FACE OF MAN; and the truth is, that magistrate who fears or hopes for any thing more than the approving himself to God, has a bias upon his judgment that will certainly lead him to be unjust.

We have a remarkable instance of this sin and weakness, in the person of Pilate. He was very desirous to release Jesus, finding no fault in Him which could deserve death. The chief priests, perceiving this, and knowing His weak side, cried out, "If thou let this man go, thou art not Cæsar's friend;" that is, in other words, though you find no fault in Him, yet if you do not condemn Him, you shall be represented as an enemy to Cæsar. Well, what followed? Why, the most execrable piece of wickedness that ever judge was guilty of. The Evangelist tells us, *that when Pilate heard that saying*,—that is, that he was in danger of losing his master's favour, by following his conscience, and doing justice,—he gave sentence, that it should be as *they desired;* not as justice required, or as his own conscience suggested. [John 19. 12, 13; Luke 23. 24.]

And as all wickedness is folly, this was so in the highest degree. For, first, he owned by this act, that he was capable of being frightened out of his duty, than which there could not be fixed upon him a greater reproach; and secondly, he most egregiously affronted that master whose displeasure he feared, by supposing that he could be pleased with a wicked action,—the death of an innocent person. And the providence of God very soon convinced him of his sin and mistake; for, notwithstanding all his care not to lose Cæsar's favour, he fell under his displeasure, was banished, and, wanting the comfort of a good conscience, he made away with himself.

And thus it will ever be, when men forget THAT THE JUDGMENT IS GOD'S, and that to God they are accountable. When they forget this, interest will prevail with them; friendship will gain upon them; passion will hurry them into error; bribes will blind their eyes; or, what the world will say will influence them.

I set God always before me, was the maxim of the best [Ps. 16. 8.

SERM. LI.

of kings. And every man, and every magistrate especially, must do so too, who would never do any thing unworthy of God; and the neglect of doing so is the occasion of all the mischiefs committed and complained of.

How seasonable, therefore, is the advice of the Wise Man, "Seek not to be judge, being not able to take away iniquity, lest thou fear the person of the mighty, and lay a stumbling-block in the way of thy uprightness."

Eccles. 7. 6.

But that the magistrate's judgment *be worthy of God*, it is necessary that he do not only *mean uprightly himself*, but that he take especial care that he be not imposed upon *by designing men*.

The generality of those that take upon them to manage causes, have nothing so much in view as their *own gain*. Let a cause be never so unrighteous, they will undertake it. Let the law be never so plain, they will endeavour to pervert it. Let a jury be never so well disposed to follow the truth, they will endeavour to lead them astray.

A magistrate, therefore, has need to be very patient, and very resolute; *patient* in finding out the truth, which such managers endeavour to hide from him, and *resolute* in following it, in spite of all their clamours.

The complaints of those that suffer by these sort of people, both in their peace and in their rights, should, one would hope, awaken the government to *regulate* at least, if not to *silence* them; and to bring us back to our old constitution, WHERE EVERY MAN PLEADED HIS OWN CAUSE; the simplest man being as able to tell his own story to a magistrate as to an attorney; and a magistrate will be better able to judge where the truth lies, when facts are laid nakedly before him without design of imposing upon him.

We have hitherto considered the magistrate's duty with respect to his fellow-creatures: but there is another branch of his duty, and a very important one, which regards the honour and the laws of God.

Every magistrate, whether ecclesiastical or civil, stands charged with this—to *consult*, to *promote*, to *countenance*, the cause of GOD, and RELIGION; for this reason, because their authority is from God, and the obedience they claim is not from any right of their own but as they are GOD's *substitutes*.

And the will of God *is,* that wickedness be punished; that sin be made uneasy to men; and that such as are not to be restrained by reason, or by the terrors of the world to come, should feel the *pain,* the *shame,* and the *punishment,* which their sins deserve in this world.

And if magistrates shall be remiss in this, they will soon see their authority undermined. For, if men be once permitted to trample upon the laws of God, they will at last trample upon that authority which should have put a stop to their wickedness. It is their *duty,* therefore, and it is their *interest,—To execute wrath against them that do evil,* as they are God's ministers (so saith the Apostle;) to take care of growing vices, to root them out betimes, lest they become too many and too strong to be cured by any authority or power but that of God's judgments upon the land, which will certainly fall upon us, when the magistrate either *will* not, or *cannot,* do his duty. Rom. 13. 4.

"The king's throne," saith Solomon, "is established by righteousness;" that is, by doing justice, by suppressing vice, by protecting the innocent, and by succouring the distressed. This is the only true way of serving the prince, and bringing a blessing upon the whole community; and to neglect these things is the ready way to ruin. [Prov. 16. 12.]

When the case is with any people as it was with the people of Laish; "who dwelt careless and secure; and there was no magistrate that might put them to shame in any thing;" their destruction (as theirs was) is near at hand; that is, when there is no prospect of a cure for the sin but by the death of the sinner. Judges 18. 7.

If these things were well considered, and for that reason I leave them last upon your minds, what an influence would they have upon us all? For instance:—

If magistrates would often consider, that they are in the place of a Judge who is infinitely *powerful, just,* and *holy,* they would endeavour so to conduct themselves, as that they might not bring contempt on Him whose place they supply; they would be very careful never to be guilty of those vices themselves, which they are obliged to discountenance and punish in others; they would be afraid of discovering the least indifference for religion and the laws of God, or for any

SERM. LI.

thing that relates to God,—the fear of God being the best support of their own authority and government.

And then, if the magistrate considered, that the *judgment is God's,* he would make the study of justice his great concern; would desire, and take pains, to find out the truth, and follow it religiously; in doing of which he would fear no man's face, nor make any man's will his law; knowing that God can protect His own faithful servants, as well as punish those that betray the trust reposed in them.

In one word, such a magistrate will accept no man's person, court no man's favour at the price of his conscience, nor fear any man's frowns.

He will consider that the judgment is God's; that is, what God Himself would pronounce.

He will be convinced, that justice is something antecedent to his sentence, and that his duty is, not to *make,* but to *declare,* the law, and what is right or wrong.

And he will never expect to be obeyed, if he should require any thing contrary to the will of God, by whose authority he acts, and in whose place he stands.

And being in the place of God, and invested with His power, he will suffer no man to be oppressed by a powerful adversary; no advantage to be taken of men's weakness, poverty, want of help, or want of friends.

And then, if the people would consider, that the judgment is God's, and that they that pronounce it are God's ministers, how cheerful would their obedience be; how peaceable their behaviour; and how thankful for the blessing of a regular government.

And if both magistrates and people are not thus disposed and thus affected, woe be to them that are in fault!

May God, the Judge of all the world, give all His substitutes a spirit to discern, and courage to execute, true judgment; and grant, that all their sentences may be such as He will approve of at the great day, to the glory of His name, through Jesus Christ our Lord. To Whom, &c.

SERMON LII.

THE TEMPTATIONS THAT LEAD TO THEFT AND ROBBERY CONSIDERED, WITH THE MEANS OF PREVENTING THESE CRIMES[a].

EXODUS xx. 15.

Thou shalt not steal.

See Eph. 4. 28; 1 Thess. 4. 6.

THIS which follows is the express account which the historians give of the *Isle of Man* more than one hundred years ago.—"The inhabitants in general of this Island have a very good character, not inclined either to *lewdness, cheating,* or *thieving,* so that every man possesseth his own in peace and safety, none living in fear of losing what he hath."

Were this still our case and character, I should have made choice of another subject for your edification. But necessity is laid upon us, *to preach against the growing sins of this land,* in which more people, we fear, are concerned, than are willing to believe it of themselves.

We shall consider, at present, those sins only that are forbidden by the eighth commandment; the temptations and causes that lead to such crimes; and the way, through God's grace and blessing, to put a stop to them, and to restore this *Isle* to its former good character, which of late (every body sees it) is much altered for the worse.

And one would hope that every christian, who has any concern either for himself, his country, or his religion, will put his helping hand to so good a work.

The first and great cause of these, and all other vices, is the neglect of *parents,* in not bringing up their children in the fear of God, and in not setting before them the dreadful

[a] Preached on occasion of the execution of some, and the banishment of others, for theft and robbery.

SERM. LII.

punishments, which in the next world will most certainly be the end and reward of sin and wickedness in this life.

They often see their children take loose and idle courses; they neglect and forbear to correct them, till sin and hell have got power over them; they suffer them to profane the Lord's day, to keep idle company, to *lie*, to *take God's name in vain* very often without reproof, and too, too often, set them an example of doing so.

And what can be the end of this? Why, *a graceless family*, prepared for every crime which the devil shall think fit to tempt them to, or their own wicked inclinations can lead them to.

If their children go out to service, they make no conscience of purloining, or cheating their masters; if they marry, they make their children and family as bad as themselves; if they fall into bad company, they are easily tempted to any wickedness which a lewd or thievish companion can propose to them. And all this comes to pass, for want of bringing children up in the fear of God, and of God's judgments upon wicked people.

The next great cause of the wickedness of this present generation is, the scandalous *neglect of the ordinances of the Gospel*, and *profaning the Lord's day*, which is the beginning of every sin.

People will not go to church, to learn their duty, and to know their danger if they neglect it. They will not hear the judgments which God has threatened in His holy Word against those that break His laws; they will not pray for His grace to defend them against the temptations of the devil, the world, and their own corrupt hearts. And what can this end in, but in forgetting the God that made them, and who has declared, that He will call them to an account, and will punish them according to their evil deeds?

All this might in a great measure be prevented, if parents would be persuaded to bring their children, and masters their servants, to church, more constantly, to worship God, and to learn their duty; and a sure blessing would attend it.

The next cause, and sure sign, of getting bread by unlawful ways, is *an idle life*, which brings men to poverty, so that they are tempted at last to steal to supply their wants.

A man that leads an idle life, who every day spends more than he earns, who has no visible way of getting what will answer his expenses, such a person must be supposed to steal: and all who entertain such persons must know, that they are encouragers and partners with thieves; and that they receive and eat the goods of honest men, which will certainly bring a curse upon all their other honest gains.

The next cause of the sin of stealing is, *the common and growing sin of drunkenness,* and the disorderly ale-houses which such people frequent: these are the very nurseries of thieves, and of disorderly servants; the keepers of them are the receivers of stolen goods, and will be as surely accountable before God, as they that stole them.

Had these sins of drunkenness, and the lewd houses which encourage such vices, had these been duly presented, as they ought to have been, and as they formerly have been, and as the law, and the oaths of wardens oblige them to do, it is more than probable, that some of those who are gone to account for their evil lives, might yet have been in the land of the living, and have repented, and lived to have brought forth fruits answerable to amendment of life.

All such as entice servants to give their masters' goods without their masters' knowledge, would take it ill to be ranked amongst thieves; but in truth they are no better than the thieves themselves, and lead the servants to greater crimes, and too often to greater punishments.

Graceless children, and unfaithful servants, generally begin with lesser crimes of this kind, and at first abhor the thoughts of such deeds as may bring them to an untimely end; but they should consider, that the same evil spirit, which has power to tempt them to pilfer, will in time lead them to crimes which will deserve death. But this is not so well considered as it ought to be.

There is another breach of this commandment, which though in the eye of the world it is not accounted so scandalous as these we have mentioned, yet it is as heinous as any of those sins for which other men lose their lives; and this is the *sin of running of goods, and defrauding the nation of the rights and power of supporting itself.* This we have borne testimony against, ever since it first began in this place; but, God knows, to very little purpose.

SERM. LII.

Covetousness, which is the root of this and of all other evils, the *desire of gain,* though never so unrighteously gotten, and the great power which men suffer the devil to have over them, are the reasons and cause that this evil still continues.

And though many, very many more of these offenders have, as we all know, come to untimely ends, more than such as have died by the hand of justice, yet it is still pursued in defiance of God and of His visible judgments. And what is the most dreadful consideration, and makes their death more terrible than that of thieves and robbers, they die in their sins, and it is much to be feared, unrepented of.

These are some of the crying sins which this island labours under. Would to God we could as easily find out a remedy for them as we can name them! But something may be done to prevent the judgments of God from falling upon us; and to regain that worthy character which your forefathers deserved, of being an honest, harmless generation of people.

Now, there is *nothing but the fear of God* can effectually do this: nothing but what will reach and touch the heart, out of which proceedeth every evil thing, nothing else can put so effectual a stop to such growing evils.

Temporal punishments are certainly necessary to restrain those whom neither *law,* nor *reason,* nor *religion,* nor *shame,* nor *fear,* have power to reclaim from the wicked courses they have fallen into. And it is a duty which every man owes to God, and to his country, to bring offenders of this kind to punishment.

It is giving glory to God, by bringing evil men to a sense of their crimes; that, suffering in this world, they may, if possible, escape in the next.

It is a means to prevent such crimes in others, and to hinder the judgments of God from falling upon a sinful nation, when such sins do not escape unpunished.

It is necessary also, and for the good of private persons; for unless this be done, nothing that an honest man enjoys can be called his own; and what has been got by hard labour and honest industry, and many years' pains and care, may be taken from him in one night, and his life in danger.

But sure, the best and the most Christian way would be,

if possible, to prevent this, by planting *the fear of God* in the hearts of men. This would keep them honest, when no other method will do it.

Wicked men may hope to hide their ways, and escape shame and punishment by their friends, or by their craft and cunning; but a man who is persuaded that God will bring every evil thing to judgment, will hardly go about a work which he knows will be punished with eternal damnation.

And one would hope that the most careless observer would take notice, *by what has so lately happened,* how God brings these hidden works of darkness to light, by ways which nobody could foresee, and which the most artful villain could not prevent.

If once we could prevail with people to pray to God along with their families, this would go a great way to cure this growing evil; children would be bred up under a sense and fear of God, and parents would be ashamed to do an ill thing before their children, with whom they are to pray before they sleep. And where masters do the same, servants would, in all probability, keep at the greatest distance from pilfering and stealing their goods, which too often leads to greater sins.

There is another consideration, which cannot too often be pressed upon the hearts and consciences of all sorts of Christians; and this is, the *absolute necessity,* where it can possibly be done, *of making restitution for the injury and wrong done to our neighbour,* as ever we hope for salvation.

What a terrible consideration will this be when it comes into the minds of men that are going to do mischief! what a check upon those that are engaged in unjust ways of getting a livelihood! *How can I make restitution for this injury?* How can I make my neighbour satisfaction for this wrong I have done, or am going to do him? Must I do this, or be shut out of heaven for ever? If shame does not hinder me, yet perhaps it will not be in my power to make amends for the wrong I have done; and knowing this before, it may be, the very impossibility will not excuse me at the great day.

I pray God graft these considerations in all our hearts, that we may appear blameless before God at *that* great day.

SERM. LII.

Another means to prevent stealing will be, for such as are able to relieve the necessities of the poor, to do it with a liberal hand, that the poor may have no temptation to steal, to support themselves and their families. It is for this reason, amongst many others, that so many blessings are promised to such as help the poor, and so many encouragements in the Holy Scriptures to perform that duty cheerfully.

Lastly; if honest people would seriously reprove their friends and relations, when they see them take evil ways, keep bad company, spend more than they can honestly spare, this might often prevent the sorrow and the shame of seeing their relations come to an evil and shameful end.

And if such as keep disorderly ale-houses, who suffer people to drink and game in the night; who receive goods which they have reason to believe are not honestly come by, or buy them at under their value; if such people would but consider, that they are really accessary to the untimely deaths such people as they deal with do afterwards come to; if they would consider this, it would make their hearts to tremble to think of the account they must one day give for shortening their neighbours' lives; and, for aught they know, sending them to hell.

Numb. 32. 23. Would to God that the words of Moses were but often in the minds of sinners, and especially of those we are speaking of: "Ye have sinned against the Lord, and be sure your sin will find you out."

Not the most secret crime, not the cunningest contrivance, not the boldest thief, not the strongest combination of sinners, can secure themselves against Him whose eyes are in every place, beholding the evil and the good; and who will bring to light the hidden works of darkness; and who by His [1 Thess. 4. 6.] Spirit has declared, that He is the avenger of all such as defraud or wrong their neighbour in any matter.

And now, good christians, I have set before you the temptations which generally lead to these sins: *Drunkenness, profaning the Lord's day, neglect of coming to the public worship, want of family religion, parents' neglect of correcting and instructing their children; masters not taking care of their servants' behaviour; wicked and profane companions,* who root out of men's minds the fear of God and of His judgments;

disorderly houses of entertainment; and lastly, an *idle life,* which brings men to poverty.

These things I have just hinted to you, that every one in our several places may do our duty, and endeavour to put a stop to these growing crimes.

That churchwardens and their assistants may take notice of, and present (as they are bound by their oaths) *sabbath-breakers, drunkards,* and *absenters,* from the public worship.

That parents may admonish and correct their children before they fall into the snare of the devil.

That servants may abhor every degree of pilfering and wronging their masters, because they cannot foresee what the least known sin may lead them to.

That magistrates may not be discouraged, nor their hands weakened, from doing their duty to God and to their country by the impertinent censures of ignorant men.

And lastly, that we may every one of us remember the command of God, *Thou shalt not hate thy brother; thou shalt not suffer sin upon him,* for that is indeed to hate him. [Lev. 19. 17.]

"Am I my brother's keeper?" was the answer of the wickedest man then upon earth. It was the answer of Cain to God. [Gen. 4. 9.]

Yes, truly every good christian is so far his brother and his neighbour's keeper, as to do as much as lieth in his power to *keep* him from ruining himself, either in this world, or in that which is to come.

He is so far his keeper, as to admonish him when he sees him take evil ways; to correct him if he has any authority over him! and, lastly, to keep him as much as he can from injuring himself or others, by bringing him to judgment; that the nation may not suffer, and draw down the judgments of God for sins that go unpunished.

SERMON LIII.

OF FRAUD.

GENESIS xliii. 12.

See Lev. 19. 13; 25. 14; Prov. 22. 16.

And take double money in your hand; and the money that was brought again in the mouth of your sacks, carry it again in your hand; peradventure it was an oversight.

A *man of justice and integrity in his dealings* is a *character* very desirable; and most people are apt to claim it *as their right.* On the other hand, there are so many ways of forfeiting this character, without a man's being exposed to the world for his dishonesty; nay, very often without taking notice of it himself; that one cannot be too earnest with people to consider this matter a little more seriously, if it were but to convince them how often they claim a character which they are not always *careful to deserve.*

But then, when it is considered, that *for every act of injustice* a man is accountable to God; and that *restitution,* where it can be, must be made, as we hope for salvation, though it is a duty which people are very hardly persuaded to submit to; these things considered, it is every body's concern to *know,* and to *avoid,* a sin of so much *deceit* and *danger.*

Now there are several parts of *injustice,* or ways of *forfeiting the character of an honest man,* which I shall not now insist upon; such are, the taking what is another man's right by secret or open force; that is, by *theft* or *robbery;* by *oppression,* when he is not able to contend with us; or by *extortion,* when his necessities force him to submit to the hardest terms we think fit to impose upon him. These are all crimes of so ill fame, that all people pretend to *abhor* them! the laws are

severe in punishing them; and such as are *guilty* are, for the most part, convinced they do ill.

But then there are *acts of injustice,* which, though they are not so *barefaced,* yet are as evil in the sight of God, as *ill-becoming an honest man and a christian,* and as *hard to be repented of,* as the former; such are, the taking advantage of men's ignorance, or mistakes; overreaching them in bargains, or in suits at law; imposing upon their belief by a pretended sincerity, and then making a hand of their simplicity: these and such as these, are the sins that I would endeavour to set in a true light, that all *good men* may *avoid* them; and that all *evil men* may *repent* of them.

Now the text I have chosen for this discourse is an instance of great integrity. It is the direction and command of Jacob to his sons; who, returning out of Egypt, where they had been to buy corn, and finding the monies which they had before taken with them packed up and returned with the rest of their goods, were greatly surprised, and at a loss what to think of so uncommon an accident. In the mean time, their father orders them what to do: "Take double money in your hand; and the money that was brought again in the mouth of your sacks, carry it again in your hand; peradventure it was an oversight."

In these words, here are *two duties* of great importance expressly set down. *Peradventure it was an oversight.* Here is a direction *never to take advantage of other people's mistakes, negligence, or ignorance. Take double money in your hand,* &c. Here is *restitution* expressly required.

Of which *two duties,* and the *sins that are contrary to them,* I will endeavour, by the assistance of God's good Spirit, so to speak, as that your time may not be altogether lost in hearing them explained.

I. To begin with the first of these duties.

Now, there being a world of practices very dishonest, and yet people make a shift to live in them without either *public reproach,* or *private regret;* it will therefore be proper to consider, how they will be able to justify themselves before the *Judge of all the earth.*

Peradventure it was an oversight; and therefore we must not make our advantage of it. This was Jacob's rule. Let

SERM. LIII.

us see how far this rule ought to oblige *all honest men,* and how well it is observed.

Now, people may not see their interest, but overlook their rights several ways; and to take advantage of their circumstances would be manifest injustice.

For instance:—If a man is in drink, he is in the very language of the world, *overseen;* and if in such circumstances he happens to fall into ill hands, and makes a bargain, it is ten to one but he heartily repents of what he has done; and very often his family smart for it. Now, a good man, when he sees this, would reason just as Jacob did; *it was an oversight,* and you shall not suffer by it.

But is this the practice of the world? Very far from it.

1 Thess. 4. 6. And though the Apostle expressly declares, "that the Lord is the avenger of all such as go beyond or defraud another in any matter;" yet people will not easily quit a good bargain, for any law of God, if the laws of man will not force them to it.

To proceed:—How easily may a poor man, who has a righteous cause, *mistake* in defending it? But will *his oversight* give *me* a right to *that,* to which, in truth, I had no just title, before I made this advantage of his weakness or poverty? Or can any body think, that because the *injustice* is done in the face of a court, that it is less a crime than if it had been done on the high road?

To feed a man with monies, or to help to run him into debt, by encouraging him to borrow, *when he has no occasion,* that I may get a better bargain of his estate, when he shall be forced to sell it; this should seem by the commonness of it, to be no great crime. But pray does the man know what he is doing? If he does not, *I take advantage of his weakness;* I help to ruin him, and perhaps his family; and if *he* is really *guilty* of a sin in squandering away the inheritance of his forefathers, it is impossible *I* should be *guiltless.*

Prov. 29. 5. "He that flattereth his neighbour," saith Solomon, "spreadeth a net for his feet." It is possible for a man, by fair speeches, to make his neighbour overlook his own interest: but then, *to take any ill advantage of a man,* because he has an opinion of *my judgment and integrity,* is a wickedness which God will certainly avenge, though no law on earth can call a man to an account for it.

Because it is less hazardous to wrong orphans than older people, is it therefore less criminal? No, sure: so far from it, that God declares Himself concerned in the cause of the fatherless and the widow; that He will undertake and vindicate their cause against those that oppress them. And why? Why, because they have none else to help them. For which *very reason* a man should be very fearful of taking advantage of the *weaknesses,* or *oversights,* of such helpless people, because such people have a right, and a promise, of redress from God. "Remove not the old land-mark; and enter not into the field of the fatherless: for their Redeemer is mighty; He will plead their cause with thee." Prov. 23. 10, 11.

How often do *wills,* and other *writings of moment,* fall into the hands of such as thereby have an opportunity of wronging their neighbour? And people that will make use of such an opportunity do generally think, that this is a less offence than *stealing.* But for what reason? Why, only because for *stealing* (if a man is caught) he will be in danger of being hanged; while at the worst he will only be called a dishonest man, if the other be discovered. And yet the crimes are equally forbidden, equally unjust, and dangerous, in the sight of God; whose judgment will be according to right, and not according to the false opinions of men.

A man who borrows monies, which he knows he cannot repay, plainly takes an advantage of his creditor's ignorance of *his* circumstances. It is probable he may fancy himself less guilty than if he had stolen so much, or taken it by force; but he would not think so, if the laws had made these two crimes equally penal, as they are in truth equally unjust in the sight of God and man.

There are too many who will make no scruple of imposing upon their neighbours' ignorance in passing off bad monies, who yet would startle at the thoughts of counterfeiting the current coin. I question whether such people have considered how near akin these two crimes are to one another.

To proceed:—If a man will take all advantages which the very laws allow, he will very often do great injustice, and in good conscience make himself liable to *restitution.* For instance:—A man, in settling his estate, which he may righteously do, *forgets some formality which the law requires.* Now,

SERM. LIII.

may I honestly go about to break this settlement? No, surely. Why, what then was the law made for? Why, purely to prevent frauds. Then, say you, he may be relieved in Chancery. But shall I give a man the trouble and the expense of law, when I believe beforehand that he has a right in conscience? A man must love the world more than the commands of God that will do so.

The *very same* must be said of *unjust prescriptions*, which yet the laws allow of. Not that length of time *can* give any man a *right* which he knows he had not from the beginning, but because there would be no end of *law-suits*, if people were to be disturbed for ever. The law, therefore, does what is best for the public in general, and leaves it to *private men* to act as they will answer *to God* and a *good conscience*.

It is too common for people to *conceal*, and to *keep*, what they have found. People do not sure consider, that there is an *express law of God* against such practices; but they will find very particular *precepts* and *directions* touching this matter, in the 22nd chapter of Deuteronomy. But do these precepts oblige *us?* Yes, sure: unless you suppose that God required of the Jews to be strictly honest, and that christians may do what they please.

In short; it would be a difficult matter to reckon up the many deceits that may be practised without being liable to be called to an account.

But the *sins of injustice*, which are *most common* and *least taken notice of*, are such as are committed in the way of *trade* and *bargains*. The Wise Man has given us fair warning of this: "As a nail," saith he, "sticketh fast between the joinings of the stones, so doth sin stick close between buying and selling."

Ecclus. 27. 2.

And therefore a man, who *desires to keep a good conscience* will be very watchful over himself where he has warning beforehand of the danger he is in; and will be glad to have *such rules* to walk by as he is sure will not deceive him.

Matt. 7. 12.

Such is that of our blessed Saviour's: *Whatsoever ye would that men should do to you, do ye even so to them.* Which, though a very general rule, yet by a well-meaning christian may be applied to all our dealings with one another.

A man, for instance, who sets this rule before his eyes,

will hardly put off damaged or distempered goods for sound; will hardly take advantage of the ignorance of the buyer; will use no deceits to raise the price, or set off the value, of what he desires to sell.

I do not here mention *false weights and measures; oppressing the poor; buying or selling of stolen goods;* using *oaths* and *lies* to *deceive* those with whom they deal. Those that do any of these things *know that they do ill;* and all the rules of the Gospel will be of no use to them, so long as they do not believe them.

But for the sake of such as really desire to make a *conscience of their ways,* one would endeavour to make their way *plain* and *safe,* and their consciences easy upon good grounds.

Now, *gain* being the *end* of trade, and every man having a *right* to a reasonable advantage, of which he himself must *very often* be the *sole judge,* he lieth under a great temptation of being favourable to his own interest, and of overlooking that of others; to prevent which, these considerations should always be present with men of business: "that he that hasteth to be rich can hardly be innocent;" that every man has a *right* to be dealt with *fairly;* that all depends upon God's blessing; that the fear of wanting what is necessary is the fear of infidels, who know not God; and *that a man's life* (and happiness) *consisteth not in the abundance of the things which he possesseth.* Prov. 28. 20.

When a man can consider such truths as these seriously, he is then *disposed* for saving instruction; he will easily hearken to the *rules of religion;* and a *few rules* will serve to direct him to keep a good conscience in the way of business.

I shall recommend one very plain rule, which will go a great way towards directing every conscientious man how to act safely with respect to *gain;* and that is, *to take such a gain, advantage, or consideration, as the person with whom I deal would be satisfied with, if he knew my business as well as I do, and the reasons which oblige me to take such a profit.*

That this is a safe and good rule in trade, is pretty plain from matter of fact; for whenever two persons deal together, who both understand their business well, a few words serve their turn: he that sells asks a reasonable gain, and he that

SERM. LIII.

buys sees it is fit he should have what he asks, *all things considered.*

Now, if men would but make this their rule, when they deal with such as are ignorant, it would prevent a great deal of guilt, which, the Wise Man saith, is almost inseparable from buying and selling.

There are certainly secrets in dealing, which every body cannot be acquainted with; but, to prevent my being partial to myself, I may suppose the person I deal with knew the reasons why I insist upon such a price, and then, if I am conscious to myself that I need not be ashamed of such *gain,* I have a good testimony of my honesty, and my conscience will never reproach me of injustice.

But if, instead of doing so, I take what I can get, make a hand of the *negligence, ignorance,* or *simplicity,* of those with whom I have to do, I practise what is *unjust;* I have no regard to the laws of the Gospel; and, if ever I do repent of this sin, I make myself liable to one of the most difficult duties of Christianity, that of *restitution* and *satisfaction;* without which my repentance will never deliver me from the sad consequences of such injustice.

But to prevent, as much as may be, any occasion for the *exercise of the duty of restitution,* I would lay before you,

First; the greatness of these sins.

Secondly; the temptations which lead to them, that we may avoid them.

Thirdly; such considerations as are most likely to keep us from running into them.

And first, we are not to judge of the *greatness of crimes,* by the opinion the world has of them. At this rate, we should not only make a jest of taking advantage of, and cheating one another, as is too common; but even the sin of *adultery,* and some other crimes, which a christian should not mention without horror, would be accounted *failings,* rather than sins which will shut us out of heaven. But we are to judge of the greatness of crimes, by the *authority* that forbids them; by the *punishment* threatened; and by the *mischiefs* that attend them.

Now, all sins of this kind are plainly against the *great rule of justice,* given by our Saviour: "Whatsoever ye would that [Matt. 7. 12.]

men should do to you, do ye even so to them." People are very sensible of any such injury done to themselves; and give very ill names to such as *overreach* them. This shews, that men do not think these *small faults* when they themselves are the sufferers.

And then, it is said expressly of *these sins*, "that the Lord is the avenger of all such;" perhaps because men are too apt to overlook them. And in another place St. Paul saith, "that the unjust shall not inherit the kingdom of heaven." [1 Thess. 4. 6.] 1 Cor. 6. 9.

Lastly; the mischiefs of these sins are very apparent: they harden the conscience; they provoke and encourage others to sin; and, what is worst of all, it is seldom that people think it necessary to repent of them.

Christians are for the most part convinced that *great* and *crying* sins, such as are liable to infamous punishments in this world, that *these* are to be particularly repented of, or *no pardon is to be expected;* but the sins of fraud are often committed without remorse, and without punishment; are easily *forgotten*, and therefore seldom *truly repented of;* which, in the end, makes them as damnable sins as those that people seem to be more afraid of.

Let us, in the second place, consider *the temptations to this vice*, and what it is that occasions people to take advantage of their neighbour, with so little regret and fear of punishment.

Is it *ignorance?* That cannot be. There is not the most ignorant person, but knows well enough, when any body wrongs him, that *that* man does ill.

Is it for *want of faith*, and that people do not believe that they are to give an account for their injustice? Few people will own such a degree of infidelity.

Is it for *want?* No, sure; for it is too often, those that have the least need are aptest to wrong and overreach their neighbours.

Is it an *immoderate love for their children*, and that people will venture at all rather than not leave them all they can? That cannot be the reason, where people have none to provide for; or where they are undutiful, and take ill ways.

What then is it which shall tempt men to run such hazards? Why, *an excessive love for the world.*

People think they have still *too little;* that *more* would

SERM. LIII.

make them *more happy*. This makes them forget *the account* they must give, and *those rules* which are prescribed by God for the peace and good government of the world. This makes them overlook their neighbour, as if he had not a *right* to be *fairly dealt with*. This makes them forget that *death* is not far from them, when they shall part with all they have unfairly gotten, and, *if they know their danger*, will wish a thousand times they had *starved* sooner than done the least injustice.

Ye see how much this sin is to be feared, and that it is possible for people by increasing their substance to increase their damnation.

Let me, therefore, recommend to you *a few considerations* to make you abhor so base a vice.

[Heb. 4. 13.] Let us seriously think of it, *that all things are naked and open unto the eyes of Him with whom we have to do;* so that what may be an oversight to man cannot be so to God. Nay, a man may be shut out of heaven for that very thing, which no law on earth could take hold of him for: or, if he repents of it, will cost him dear before he can be forgiven.

Believe it, christians! the Lord is nigh them that are wronged, to do them justice, when they call upon Him in the bitterness of their soul; and it will be no advantage to a man to have doubled his talents, when he has doubled his guilt and his punishment.

Even your posterity shall suffer for your fraud; and you are only laying up a treasure of judgments for those very children which you are so passionately fond of. "God will lay up the iniquities of sinners for their children," saith Job. So that it were much better they were left to the wide world, than with any thing that is got by deceit.

chap. 21. 19.

Depend upon it, neither your *care* in *settling* what you will leave, nor your *advice* to your heir, nor *lands*, nor *securities*, nor *bonds*, nor *locks*, can preserve what you shall get by fraud. No, *not repentance itself.*

That is hard, you will say; will not God pardon me upon *my repentance?* Why, you think, perhaps, that repentance consists in confessing your fault, and asking God's pardon, *without making restitution:* as if a thief, who has got enough to live upon, should ask God's pardon, and then think all is

well and forgiven. Who does not see the wickedness of such an opinion?

To conclude. If we would follow the good patriarch's advice, and be innocent, it is necessary that we have *his faith* and *affections*. As how? Why, the Apostle tells us, "that he looked for a city whose builder and maker is God;" that is, he did not so much concern himself with what he might get in this short life, but he was for securing, *by all means*, an inheritance in heaven. He kept his *eye* and his *heart* there. And this made him despise all unjust advantages that came in his way, knowing that *this was not the world he was made for*. Heb. 11. 10.

And in truth, without this consideration be always present with us, the world has so many temptations to draw us out of the way, that it will be impossible for a man to resist them. *Self-interest, a present advantage, the slight opinion the world has of such crimes,* will all contribute to draw a man into a snare, who is not stedfastly purposed in his heart, that no worldly advantage shall prevail with him to forfeit his inheritance in heaven. "For what shall it profit a man if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul?" [Matt. 16. 26.]

We have not now time to consider particularly, *what is to be done,* where people have by design or unwittingly fallen into this error. The text directs us to *restitution,* as the only means to preserve the character of honest men, and of christians: and justice and conscience say the same thing. It is a *difficult,* and it is a *necessary* duty: these two considerations should prevail with people to beware of a sin which requires so *ungrateful* a remedy.

And may the fear and grace of God be with us, to preserve us from injustice of all kinds, and that we may serve Him in truth and righteousness all our days, through Jesus Christ. *Amen.*

SERMON LIV.

THE NATURE OF SIN, AND THE PUNISHMENT THAT CERTAINLY FOLLOWS IT.

NUMB. xxxii. 23.

See Exod. 20; 32. 34; Job 13. 26; Hosea 7. 2.

Behold, ye have sinned against the Lord: and be sure your sin will find you out.

THESE words may be rendered two ways; either as I now read them, *Behold, ye have sinned against the Lord, and be sure your sin will find you out;* or thus, *Behold, ye have sinned, and ye shall be sensible of it when evil overtakes you;* or, *Ye shall know your sin in the punishment thereof.* From which words we may take a just occasion of considering the *nature of sin,* and the *punishment that certainly follows it.*

Behold, ye have sinned, &c. I think it may very truly be said, that most people, when they commit any sin, do hope that they shall never hear of it again. At least, there are few people engaged in sinful courses, who are persuaded that *no sin shall escape without its due reward.*

Now, this is a truth which must of necessity be explained and made out, before ever we can hope to persuade people to keep out of the way of temptations, or to resist temptations when they meet with them against their will.

For if a man be once persuaded, that he cannot possibly escape the judgments of God, but that either in this world, or (which is much worse) in the next, they will certainly overtake him, if he sin presumptuously; that if in his own person, which is not often, he should escape the avenging hand of God, yet that his children, and his children's children unto the third and fourth generation, may feel the smart of his folly and wickedness; if this could be so pressed upon men's

minds as to be received and believed, it must certainly in some measure, put a stop to a great many crying sins which are but too rife amongst us.

Let us therefore consider some of those most remarkable instances of God's displeasure against sin, and the punishments that have always attended it.

To begin with that of our first parents: and that this in some measure affected the whole creation, and particularly their offspring, we have all reason to be sensible of by the many evils which we are subject to. Their first-born *son* felt it with a witness; and he was more inexcusable, in that he had warning given him by God Himself of what would follow, if he should go on to envy his brother as he did. "If thou doest well;" that is, if thou repentest of this fault, "shalt thou not be accepted and forgiven? But if thou doest not well, sin lieth at the door," ready to hurry thee to destruction. So that going in or coming out, thy guilt and punishment will always follow thee. And Cain felt this truth to his sorrow: "My punishment is greater than I can bear." Why, what was this punishment he so sorrowfully complains of? "Behold Thou hast driven me out this day, and from Thy face shall I be hid; and I shall be a fugitive and a vagabond in the earth: and it shall come to pass, that every one that findeth me shall slay me."

[Gen. 4. 7.]

[Gen. 4. 13, 14.]

Here is an exact description and the case of a person *excommunicated for his crimes;* as Cain indeed was by this sentence passed upon him by God Himself. Nothing but *guilt,* and *dreadful apprehension of punishment hanging over his head,* follows him wherever he goes, when once he is out of God's presence, from under His especial protection, and given over to the power of Satan.

And oh! that people would but consider this, before they yield to the temptations that beset them; that they would think of the *shame,* of the *sorrow,* of the *guilt,* of the *punishment,* that even in *this life* they are sure to meet with by consenting to known iniquity; that those that are *going to do wrong* would consider, how hard it will be to make *restitution,* and yet that *restitution* must be made (where it can be) as we hope for salvation; that the *fornicator* and *adulterer* would consider, that when he gives way to this wickedness, "he goes

[Prov. 7. 22, 23.]

SERM. LIV.

as an ox to the slaughter, or as a bird hasteth to the snare, and knoweth not that it is for his life," and that both soul and body lie at stake; that the *oppressor* would consider, that the "triumphing of the wicked is but short;" (as holy Job expresseth it, chap. xx.) "and though he hath swallowed down riches, yet he shall vomit them up again; that in the fulness of his sufficiency he shall be in straits, and a fire not blown shall consume him;" lastly, that we would all consider, that "there is no peace to the wicked," whatever they may propose to themselves; and that when they least think of it, "destruction shall come upon them; their sin will surely find them out."

[ver. 5, 15, 22, 26.]

[Is. 57. 21.]

[1 Thess. 5. 3.]

But to proceed; the next remarkable punishment of sin recorded in Scripture was that of the *flood*, wherein the whole world (eight persons only excepted) were overtaken by their sins, and the vengeance of an offended God.

The cities of *Sodom* and *Gomorrah* were the next dreadful instances of God's displeasure against impenitent sinners; and the fire and brimstone, by which they were destroyed, are a standing, though faint, representation of that punishment which is appointed for impenitent sinners in the world to come.

Very remarkable, in the next place, were the plagues of Egypt, both for their number and circumstances; an example for all following generations, of the extreme folly of men's hardening their hearts under the judgments of God, instead of being amended by them.

And then, lest men should fancy themselves out of danger, because of the relation they bear to God; because, for instance, they are in covenant with Him, or because they have received very great favours at His hands; or, lastly, because they are not so great sinners as others that yet escape; to convince the world of this mistake, these very people of Israel, for whose sake God had wrought so many wonders in Egypt, these very people became the most remarkable example of God's justice and severity against such as go on to disobey Him, notwithstanding the warnings He hath given them. Their sin found them out wherever they went, whether in the *wilderness*, or in the land of *Canaan*; and their wickedness followed them at their heels, until they were driven out of

that good land, and sent as strangers among all nations, to teach them *what an evil thing and bitter it is to forsake the Lord.* [Jer. 2. 19.]

But before this came to pass, and while they were yet under the more immediate government of God, and under the direction of His prophets, we have several remarkable instances left us upon record of God's severe judgments upon private men, and families, as well as upon whole nations, for the contempt of His laws.

I shall only mention the calamities which befel the house of David, for his two crying sins, *adultery* and *murder;* and the house of Solomon, for his sins, *intemperance* and *idolatry.* I mention *these,* because they were both great *princes,* and accountable to none but God for their irregularities; both highly favoured of God before they fell; and both as severely punished afterwards.

The crimes of David were with great art and contrivance concealed from the knowledge of the world; but all this would not do, *his sin found him out,* and brought upon him such a series of disasters as were enough to have driven any other man to despair, and such as would have done so by him, if, upon *his sincere repentance,* he had not been supported by the Spirit of God. His *sons,* one murdered another; rose in rebellion against himself, drove him from his own palace, debauched his wives. His *subjects,* many of them abandoned him; the very vilest of his people affronted him to his face; and that very son whom he most doated on, he had the mortification to see slain in the midst of his iniquities and rebellion.

His son Solomon (when once he forsook the commandment of God) fared no better; he *multiplied strange wives;* these soon introduced *idolatry;* and this abominable sin was the occasion of infinite misfortunes, which befel his family and kingdom for many generations.

Now, all these things were written for our example, and admonition, that we may see what we are to expect; what *have* been, and what are *like to be,* the fruits of sin. That if neither *private men,* nor *princes;* if neither *single cities,* nor *whole nations,* have escaped; if the third and fourth generations have felt the smart of their ancestors' folly and wicked-

SERM. LIV.

ness, it will be the maddest presumption in the world, for any man to think that *his sin* only *shall not find him out.*

The truth is, we are generally so far from being ignorant of *this,* that there is nothing more usual than for people, and those of the meanest capacities, to make *this observation,* that God, even in this world, does one time or other overtake sinners. The only mistake and misfortune we labour under is *this,* that while we do easily see the sins of other people in their punishment, we are not willing to believe that this will be our own case.

Now, this is a very fatal delusion, to acknowledge the *justice of God,* and *His providence,* in other men's punishments, and at the same time not to be awakened ourselves, and warned not to offend the righteous Judge of all the earth.

This, therefore, will oblige us to consider, what it is that so bewitches men to do those things which they have reason to believe they must dearly pay for one time or other.

Now, every man, who *knowingly* breaks the laws of God, must of necessity lie under some of these following *errors* or *delusions:*

First; that a man may avoid the punishment due to his sins, either by committing them in *secret,* or by his *power,* or *wisdom,* if they should happen to be known. Or, *secondly;* he may hope to repent, before the judgments of God shall overtake him. Or, *thirdly;* a man may fancy that it is not possible for him to avoid either the sin or the punishment that attends it. Or, *fourthly;* because some have escaped the judgments of God in this world, though their sins have been sufficiently provoking, there are many who hope that they may do so also. *Lastly;* there are but too many, who never think of a judgment to come, and if they can but escape in this life, they are not at all concerned for any after-reckoning.

These are, I think, the most *common delusions* by which men are led *knowingly* to sin against God, though they are *plainly told,* and generally find by sad experience, *that their sin will find them out.*

It will be necessary to bestow a few reflections upon each of these *most fatal delusions.*

And first; it is no new thing for people to hope to *hide* their sins, and by that means to escape the punishment that is due to them. "Hast thou seen" (saith God to Ezekiel) "what these people do in the dark? For they say, the Lord seeth us not." [chap. 8. 12.] And Job tells us, that the adulterer "waiteth for the twilight, saying, No eye shall see me." chap. 24. 15.

But alas! all this caution will not do. "The eyes of the Lord are in every place, beholding the evil and the good." [Prov. 15. 3.] And both good and bad men have always found this true: "Thou didst this thing secretly," saith the Lord to David, "but I will punish thee before all Israel, and before the sun:" 2 Sam. 12. 12. that is, that they may see thy crimes in the judgments executed upon thee.

It will be sufficient to discover the folly of this delusion, by only repeating the words of the son of Sirach: "A man that breaketh wedlock," or doeth any other wickedness, "saying thus in his heart, Who seeth me? What need I to fear? Such a man only feareth the eyes of men, and knoweth not that the eyes of the Lord are ten thousand times brighter than the sun. This man shall be punished in the streets of the city; and where he suspecteth not, he shall be taken; that men may know that there is nothing better than the fear of the Lord." Ecclus. 23. 18, &c.

After all, there is some *modesty*, though not much *wisdom*, in endeavouring to hide one's sins. But then there are people who are not concerned to be at this trouble, who are neither *ashamed* of their faults, nor *afraid* of the punishment they deserve. But what do they get by this? Why, they escape the censures of men, which are designed to reclaim them; *and they fall into the hands of the living God,* than which, the Scriptures say, nothing can be more *dreadful.* [Heb. 10. 31.]

And indeed we have instances enough, and some of them of the *greatest men on earth*, who were made sensible of this truth,—*that God is able to controul those who despise all other power.*

David and Nebuchadnezzar are two of those princes who felt this to their sorrow; and Joab, and his brother, were two of those subjects who were too great for the laws, and too hard for their prince's power to deal with them. But God met with them in a way worthy of their crimes.

SERM. LIV.

And to instance but in one more:—Pray, who called Judas to an account for *betraying the innocent blood?* The government approved of what he had done, and paid him for it; and he might have lived longer to have enjoyed his reward, if *his sin had not found him out,* and driven him to destruction. [Matt. 27. 3, 4.]

All considering people will learn from what has been said, what a foolish and dangerous thing it is to hope to escape by *concealing* their crimes, by *standing* in them, or by *encouraging* other people in their wickedness, as if no harm would follow.

I shall conclude this particular with the words of the Wise Man: "Mercy may pardon the meanest," or the humble; "but mighty men," such as fear nothing, "shall be mightily tormented. For He who is Lord over all standeth in awe of no man's person;" and very often causeth, (as the same Wise Man expresseth it,) "that they who promised to drive away terrors and troubles from others, became sick themselves of fear." Wisd. 6. 6; 17. 8.

But, secondly; *There are many who know they do ill, but hope to repent, and be forgiven, before the judgments of God overtake them.*

Those who thus delude themselves, and speak thus of repentance, know very little what *repentance is,* and hardly imagine what a bitter cup they are preparing for themselves, if ever they should repent, *which is very uncertain.*

Fear of punishment hanging over our heads may help us to counterfeit repentance, but does not always produce *true repentance.* Pharaoh himself, when he feared his destruction to be at hand, cries out, "I have sinned; the Lord is righteous, and I and my people are wicked." But, after all, here was no true repentance. Exod. 9. 27.

It will be sufficient to shew the extreme folly of depending upon such repentance, while we continue in sin, by asking a few short questions.

Can you, do you suppose, repent when you please? Do not you take the ready way to provoke God to harden your heart, so that it will be impossible for you ever to repent? Will your repentance, are you sure, hinder the judgments of God from falling upon you? May not God, *supposing you*

shall repent, forgive you in the next world, and yet make you dearly pay for your presumption in this?

In short, whoever sins wilfully, in hopes that by repentance hereafter all shall be well with him, doth in effect resolve as follows: that some time or other he will be heartily sorry for what he is going to do; that he will wish he had never done it; that he will be ashamed and weep bitterly; that he will loath and abhor himself; that he will be afflicted, and mourn, and weep, for the evil that he is going to commit, &c.

But this is but one part of repentance: he must, moreover, (as the Apostle bids the faithful penitent,) "Go boldly to the throne of grace, that he may obtain mercy." Heb. 4. 16.

Now, if any man can hope, that he *can with confidence hereafter go to the throne of grace,* without a resolution of forsaking his sins at present, and quitting all occasions of them, he must hope without reason and without promise.

That repentance is a thing highly acceptable to God; that God of His great mercy will accept of our repentance instead of a perfect obedience; that God is *long-suffering, giveth time and space* for repentance, doth not hastily execute His judgments, is not willing that *any should perish;* these are all undoubted truths. But that He will be merciful where men are obstinate; that we should offend Him at present, in hopes of appeasing Him hereafter: God forbid that such thoughts should come into a christian's heart; God forbid that any christian should suffer such thoughts to lodge there!

But, thirdly; there is another delusion, which is not less common, or less dangerous: *when people fancy that it is not possible for them to avoid either the sin, or the punishment that attends it.*

This has been an old and wicked complaint against God. The son of Sirach justly reproves all that speak after this manner: "Say not thou, He hath caused me to err, for He hath no need of the sinful man." Ecclus. 15. 12. And yet wicked men are very apt to say this, and to excuse themselves; *This was my lot, and I could not avoid it.*

Now, thus far they are in the right; namely, God has ordained, that every sin shall have its due reward; that the wicked shall be taken in their own traps; that the drunkard

SERM. LIV.

and the glutton should come to poverty; that drowsiness shall clothe a man with rags; that riches got by vanity shall be diminished; *that He will visit the sins of the fathers upon the children unto the third and fourth generation of them that hate Him.*

[Exod. 20. 5.]

But to say, that God has ordained men to sin, when He hath expressly declared, *that He desireth not the death of a sinner; that He would have all men to be saved; that it is purely because men will not retain God in their knowledge, that God gives them over to a reprobate mind, to work all wickedness with greediness:* after this, to excuse themselves, by pretending a necessity of sinning, will by no means lessen their sin or their punishment.

[Ezek. 18. 23; 1 Tim. 2. 4; Rom. 1. 28; Eph. 4. 19.]

The next delusion we took notice of was this; *that because some have escaped the judgments of God in this world, others are hereby encouraged not to fear them.*

But if people would but consider, they would see, that since sin must be punished either in this life, or in the life to come, a sinner has no reason to rejoice, or to harden himself in wickedness, because God does not call him to an account here.

St. Paul reasons after another manner: "When we are judged, we are chastened of the Lord, that we should not be condemned with the world," namely, to eternal punishments. So that whenever a man is sensible that he has offended God, if he would be thought a child of God, he ought to expect, and be thankful for, His fatherly chastisement.

1 Cor. 11. 32.

Directly contrary to this is the way of wicked men: if they are chastened, they repine; if no evil befalls them they are hardened. Unhappy men! whom neither *prosperity* can *invite*, nor *adversity force*, to fear God.

The last delusion is that *of those who are resolved not to think of a judgment to come; and who, if they can but escape in this world, are not concerned for an after-reckoning.* But will this secure us? Are we sure we shall not be accountable, because we have not thought of such an account? It is impossible to describe the folly of such a way of reasoning.

Pray let us make the experiment in matters of less moment; let us try, for instance, whether by such an indifference as this is, we can keep ourselves from poverty or from death?

Whether a spendthrift is farther off ruin, because he does not think of it? Let us also consider what St. Paul saith to this purpose: "If we believe not, yet God abideth faithful, He cannot deny Himself;" that is, what God has appointed *will* come to pass, though all the world should resolve not to believe it. 2 Tim. 2. 13.

This was exactly the case of the old world. They were forewarned of the approaching flood, but not one would lay this to heart; and what was the consequence, but that they all perished in their iniquity?

So that you see what will be the consequence of sin, though *we* should altogether hold our peace, though *you* should altogether refuse to hear us.

If you have sinned against the Lord, your sin will surely find you out; that the world may be convinced, that God governs it in truth and justice, and that He sees all things that are done under the sun; that good men may be reclaimed by His fatherly corrections; that wicked men may be left without excuse; and that all may be awakened into a due care of their ways, that they avoid what will otherwise certainly come upon them.

I will conclude the whole with these short observations:

First; That since God has, in all ages, and upon all sorts of people, given so many instances of His severe displeasure against sin, it is the greatest folly and presumption *to sin,* depending upon the goodness of God, or in hopes that our being called by *His* name will excuse us from punishment.

Secondly; That we ought not to repine, if, when our sin has found us out, we receive the just reward of our iniquities; but, with an humble submission to God's will, be well pleased that our punishment is not reserved to the next world.

Thirdly; That since all afflictions are designed in mercy to better us, the best use we can make of them is, to search our ways, see whom we have offended, and, by a sincere repentance, endeavour to appease the anger of God; or, in our Saviour's words and advice, "to sin no more, lest a worse evil cometh." [John 5. 14.]

Fourthly, and above all things, let us consider, that however well we may *escape,* or *bear* afflictions *here,* yet, if we do

SERM. LIV.

not sincerely repent us of our sins, our sins will *one day* find us out, and overtake us, when God shall judge the world in righteousness, and give to every man according to his ways, and according to the fruit of his doings, whether they have been good or bad.

Now, may God, of His infinite mercy, turn from us all those evils that we most righteously have deserved. May we ever acknowledge the *hand*, and the *justice* of God, in whatever His providence bringeth upon us; and whatever befalls us in this world, may we, by a timely repentance, prevent and escape the wrath to come, for Jesus Christ's sake.

To Whom, with the Father, &c.

SERMON LV.

FORNICATION FORBIDDEN BOTH IN THE LAW AND IN THE GOSPEL.

EPHES. v. 3—5.

But fornication, and all uncleanness, or covetousness, let it not be once named amongst you, as becometh saints: [that is, christians:] *neither filthiness, nor foolish talking, nor jesting, which are not convenient: but rather giving of thanks. For this ye know, that no whoremonger, nor unclean person, nor covetous man who is an idolater, hath any inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and of God.*

See Deut. 22. 22; 23. 17; 2 Sam. 13. 13; Prov. 9. 18; 22. 14; Hosea 4. 11; Matt. 5. 28; 1 Cor. 7. 2; 9. 27; 1 Pet. 2. 11; 1 John 3. 3.

THE things, good christians, I am going to warn you against, are the sins of *fornication,* and other *impurities,* forbidden both in the *law* and in the *Gospel;* concerning which the Apostle saith, "that no whoremonger, nor unclean person, hath" nor can have "any inheritance in the kingdom of Christ, and of God."

But that is not all; for St. John adds, "that such shall have their portion in the lake that burneth with fire and brimstone." Rev. 21. 8.

These are *frightful words;* and I repeat them, that you may be prepared to hear what I am going to say upon this subject, with the greatest seriousness.

Now there are *three sorts of people,* to whom I am going to speak.

First; To such as have not defiled themselves with these vile sins.

Secondly; To such as know themselves guilty, but have never laid it seriously to heart, what danger they are in, and

SERM. LV.

what will be their portion, if they go on in their wickedness.

Lastly; To such as are sensible of their error, and sincerely desire to be restored to God's favour, which, by such foul vices, they have forfeited; to such I would give proper directions for their recovery.

I. My first instruction shall be *to such as have not defiled themselves by these crimes.* And when I have plainly laid before you, first, how *happy* they are who keep themselves undefiled and innocent from such foul vices; secondly, what an *evil thing* and *bitter* it will be to fall into such courses; thirdly, the great *danger* people are in of falling into this sin; and lastly, the *means* which God has afforded us of *avoiding* both the sin and the danger; when this is done, those that hear with attention will be convinced, I hope, that they *have reason,* that they *may* and *ought* to preserve their innocence as they value their souls.

And *first;* It is a great misfortune that very often we do not *see* our happiness till we *feel* the want of it.

We see people, for example, exceedingly ashamed when their wickedness comes to light; *blaming* their folly, *lamenting* their condition, their *friends* reproaching, and the *laws* correcting them. This should make us to abhor such vices; to be very thankful to God, who has hitherto kept us from falling; and to see the *wisdom* and the *happiness* of those that *fear God,* and *keep His commandments.*

And then, they that value a good name above all things, and labour to be esteemed, they know very well that sobriety and modesty are necessary to gain the good opinion of all wise people.

On the other hand, *the attire of an harlot,* the *wit* of an impudent woman, the *beauty* of one that is dishonest, please those only who are void of all worth and goodness. But *these* are worldly considerations only: they may serve to restrain, but can hardly make us virtuous.

The *true happiness* of such as keep themselves *pure* consists in *doing the will of God,* whose will is, "that we abstain from fornication;" in knowing that the good Spirit of God will not forsake them, while they are free from pollutions; in a constant experience of the power of God, delivering them

1 Thess. 4. 3.

from evil; and lastly, in the testimony of a good conscience, that they use their best endeavours *to mortify their corrupt affections,* as well as to preserve their reputation with the world.

Secondly; But the *happiness* of those that lead a *chaste life* will better be seen when compared with *the wretched condition of such as, being possessed with an unclean spirit, do commit all iniquity with greediness.*

The Apostle saith, "that fornication, and uncleanness, [Eph. 5. 3.] are sins which should not be named," should not, if possible, be known "amongst christians;" for they are sins which defile the soul, as well as the body; they *ruin the understanding;* they *sear* the *conscience;* they *destroy* all good purposes; they are the *occasion* of infinite other sins. For instance:

How many infants have been murdered? How many women have in effect murdered themselves, by taking medicines to hide their shame? How many have been perjured? How many have broke their *own,* and how many have broke their *parents'* hearts?

And do not think to say within yourselves, *I should hardly do what others have done;* I would never *forswear* myself; I would never consent to *murder a child;* for, believe it for a *certain truth,* if you once become the *devil's servant,* you must then *do* what *he* will have you to do, as others *have done* before you, *let what will follow.*

Then pray consider, that if once you get *evil habits,* and especially of *these sins,* you will find it exceeding hard to leave them. And yet you *must* leave them, or you must never think of going to heaven.

Nay, suppose you do resolve, and do in good earnest repent of your sin, yet there is still a very melancholy consideration behind; you can but repent for *one,* you can but repent for *yourself;* and whether those that have been partners with you in iniquity, whether *those* will ever repent, you *know not.* Neither can you be sure that your own repentance will be accepted, or whether the blood of those that perish will not be required at your hands.

After all, it is much to be feared, that *these sins are too seldom truly repented of.* They are *very common,* and people

SERM. LV.

make *light of them;* they are very hardly brought to confess them in public; and when they do so, they are often more affected with the *shame* than with the *sin* that caused it; so that they have great reason to doubt of the sincerity of their own repentance.

Add to all this, the terrors of a guilty conscience, the fearful expectation of the vengeance of God,—and no more, sure, needs to be said, to shew the evil of *this sin;* and these considerations should give christians such an abhorrence of all impurity, as to make them tremble for every fear of falling into any of these crimes.

Thirdly; *For we are, in truth, in greater danger than is generally thought of.*

It cannot be denied, but that people live in the world, as if there were no danger, as if they were secure against all temptations; and this is the reason why so many miscarry.

Christians do not consider, that as long as they live in this world, they carry a corrupt heart, and a corrupt nature, about them; that the devil will take all opportunities to lead them into sin; that we are beset with temptations, turn us where we will; that people have been ruined when they have least thought of it; that therefore we have need of *an especial grace,* and of all *possible care,* to keep us from falling into this vice; especially if we consider, that there is scarce *any age,* or any *condition of life,* free from danger.

How many have fallen into these crimes even before they could well be suspected! And too many have continued in them when *age,* and even the *sight of death,* should have cured them of their lusts.

How many, who have had a sober education, have afterwards fallen into lewd courses; and very many after the most solemn vows to the contrary.

In short; there are so many instances of these sins, known to all the world; and so many more (it is to be much feared) done in secret, and known only to God, and to those that are guilty, that every christian, who has any fear for himself, will seriously consider *the danger he is in,* and will think, *by what means he, and all that belong to him, may avoid both the sin and the danger.*

Fourthly; *What those means and motives are,* we come now to consider. And let me, in the first place tell you, for a truth, *that nothing but the fear of God can hinder you from falling into these destructive vices.*

Some will tell you, that *shame* will restrain you; that the *fear of punishment* ought to make you afraid; that if you fall into evil courses, you will disoblige your friends, and it will be worse for you; that you will spend what you have, and be despised by every body. But after all, I am afraid these arguments will not do: for these vices are too common. People are not ashamed of them, as they ought to be; and when the devil has filled their hearts with lust, they will care for neither *friends, estate,* nor *reputation.*

What then, must people be left to themselves? No, by no means. We should rather set before them *what will make them to tremble:* "Whoremongers and adulterers God will judge," however they escape the censures of man: "they shall have no inheritance in the kingdom of heaven." "They shall have their portion in the lake that burneth with fire and brimstone." Will not this consideration make people afraid of a sin which will ruin them for ever? Either say, you do not believe this, or resolve to live as if you *did* believe it. Say, with Joseph, when you are tempted, "How can I do this great wickedness, and sin against God?" *whose eyes are in every place, beholding the evil and the good.*

Heb. 13. 4. 1 Cor. 6. 9, 10. [Rev. 21. 8.]

Gen. 39. 9. [Prov. 15. 3.]

After all, it must be owned, that there are people who know, and pretend to believe all this, who yet transgress these laws. But then, they are such as *do not fear God.* For such as are afraid of offending God will strive to mortify their corrupt affections; will avoid, as much as may be, all occasions and temptations to a sin, which does so easily beset us; and will most sincerely beg God's grace and protection.

It is impossible for any man to live as becomes a christian, who will not use *these means to preserve his innocence.*

For, first, *intemperance* and *chastity* are utterly inconsistent. He that will study to please the flesh, will not care to please God. And remember, that he who cannot deny his appetites in meat and drink, will not be able to deny himself when his desires shall lead him to forbidden wickedness.

SERM. LV.

St. Paul himself thought it a duty *to keep under his body:* and shall *we* think it needless? Rather let us be at some pains to *subdue* our corrupt nature, to *deny* its cravings, to lay some wholesome restraints upon our inclinations, especially since it is for avoiding those sins which lead *directly to hell.*

[1 Cor. 9. 27.]

[Ezek. 16. 49.]

Fulness of bread, and abundance of idleness, was that which brought destruction upon Sodom; and it is what will corrupt the *best heart.* It was for this reason the Wise Man set down this *worthy caution;* "If thou givest thy soul the desires that please her, she will make thee a laughing-stock to thine enemies that malign thee;" and especially, to our *ghostly enemies,* who will desire no better occasion to ruin us.

Ecclus. 18. 31.

In the second place; *temptations,* and *occasions of sin,* are carefully to be avoided. IDLE COMPANY has ruined so many, that it would be needless to warn you against it, but that we see people as *fearless* in ill company, as if they had the power, in their own hands, of *resisting temptations;* so that, not knowing their *own weakness,* and *fearing no danger,* they often fall into a snare before they think of it. And a *lewd behaviour,* an immodest *story,* a filthy *song,* have very often betrayed unwary people into *such miscarriages* as (before) *they abhorred,* and which they have bitterly repented of all the days of their lives.

Whoever therefore purposes to preserve their innocence, must set a watch upon their *eyes,* their *ears,* and especially upon their *hearts;* otherwise it is to no purpose to *resolve,* or to *pretend* to be virtuous.

Will a man or woman, for example, who will run into any company, hear any sort of language without blushing, see indecent actions without leaving the place; will such people say they are chaste? They have no reason to say so; or if they *do,* they have no reason to be believed.

And though we cannot live in the world without meeting with temptations, yet we may avoid them much oftener than we do; and if we have the fear of God in our hearts, we shall not be hurt by them. Let but women so behave themselves, as that men may believe them to be chaste; and they may be confident nobody will attempt them *but in an honest way.*

But *this* is the real occasion of so many miscarriages: people discover, either by their very *vain dress*, or *looks*, or *words*, or *behaviour*, they discover *that they do not fear God*, that they only *want to be tempted;* and this encourages those that are as naught as themselves to *tempt*, and to *gain their wicked ends* of them. Let us therefore remember, that when we say, *lead us not into temptation*, we are bound not to run into temptations willingly; or if we do, we must not expect that God will deliver us from evils of our own seeking.

What has been now said shews us the necessity of another *means* of preserving our innocence, and that is, *fervent prayer;* since it is impossible, in the midst of so many temptations, for any christian to be long innocent, unless *supported by Divine grace.*

The very slightest temptation will ruin us, if left to ourselves: therefore has God encouraged us to *pray* to Him for help, and has promised to hear us. But then, it is not any sort of prayer that will prevail with Him, to *prevent*, or to *deliver* us from evil. We must know our *own misery, to humble us;* we must know our *danger*, to make us be in good earnest; and our *weakness* and *backslidings*, that we may be more careful of our ways. Such dispositions as *these* will recommend us to God's favour and protection.

And the true reason why so many people become an easy prey to the devil, is this: they seldom pray in private; they pray in public without any sense of their wants, without any *concern* to be heard, without *devotion*, and without *reverence*. How then should they expect to be heard, and delivered from danger?

If christians did but know to what miseries *those* are abandoned who are possessed with an unclean spirit, they would pray to be delivered from such a *curse* with *more concern* than a man that asks to be delivered from *perpetual slavery*.

But there is another *means* which God has appointed, that men may have no pretence for running into vices which must certainly ruin them soul and body; and this is, a *chaste marriage*. "Marriage is honourable in all," saith the Apostle, "and the bed undefiled; but whoremongers and adulterers God will judge." [Heb. 13. 4.]

SERM. LV.

Believe it, christians, the lawful provision which God has made for those that *cannot contain;* the more *easy* the remedy is, the more *severe* will be *their* punishment, and the more difficult *their* pardon who refuse to make use of it, and rather choose *their own abominable ways,* to satisfy their brutish lusts. As for such as have chosen *this remedy,* they have all the obligations to be content with such a merciful provision, that *God* or *man* can lay upon them. It is *God's ordinance;* they have solemnly vowed *to observe it;* it is plainly their interest to do so, as they value either *a quiet life,* or *a peaceable conscience;* but above all, *as they hope for salvation.*

If we believe the sacred Scriptures, they tell us expressly, Prov. 7. 27. that *this sin leads directly to hell;* and *everlasting destruction* is not to be *jested with.* One would hope that no more need to be said upon that head.

But now we are speaking of the *means of preserving people from falling into these foul vices,* we must not forget *the duty of parents, and the great care they ought to take, to prevent their children from falling into these deadly crimes.*

And first, it is very observable, that if a woman of Israel committed folly, *by playing the whore in her father's house,* she was to be *stoned to death;* and with this most *afflicting* Deut. 22. 21. *circumstance;* she was to be brought to the "*door of her father's house,* and the men of her city were to stone her with stones till she died." A sad spectacle, God knows, and a punishment very often as great upon the *father* as upon the child!

And what was this for? Why, to oblige parents to take all possible care of their children's education and manners; to keep them from *evil company;* to teach them the *fear of the Lord;* to *correct them* when they say or do any thing contrary to chastity; to *pray for them;* to set them a sober example; to *marry them* in due time; and not to expose them to the snare of the devil, out of cursed covetousness, or for some base ends.

And though *this law* does not take place *here,* yet parents should consider, that by neglecting *these duties,* they expose their children, and themselves too, *to very great evils,* of which *shame* and *punishments* in this world *are the least.*

One cannot wonder to see parents in great trouble for the loss of their children; but then should not this natural affection lead them to endeavour that their children may be happy when they die? And yet *that* is impossible, if you breed them up *without the fear of God.* All the hope you can have is, that some time or other they *may repent.*

But little do you know what goes to *true repentance,* and especially for *sins of uncleanness;* they are so bewitching, when once people have fallen into evil courses, that it is very hard to forsake them. Besides, it is not every one who changes his course of life that truly repents him of his faults. If the heart is not changed, there is no conversion. So that it is much to be feared, that very many, whom we hope well of, do never truly repent, must never go to heaven. And how far parents are answerable for this, their own consciences will tell them.

And indeed it is no wonder that *these sins* are so *very common.* It is plain, young people do not know their duty, nor the *dangers* they are exposed to. We must use the very *rigour* of the law to *force* them to come to be instructed. As for *shame,* how should *that* restrain them, when even many of the gravest of our people make no more than a jest of these sins when they come to be openly censured? They speak of them before their children and servants, as if there were no more in them *than doing penance.*

And when the Church, by *this discipline,* as the last remedy, hopes to recover them to a sense of their errors, what pains will they take to avoid her censures, or to have them mitigated?

Add to all this, how very many families are there, in which there is not the least *sign* of religion; where they never pray to God for His blessing; where they never give Him thanks for His mercies; where they never beg His grace for themselves or for their children? Will any body expect that such people should resist temptations?

If one must speak the plain truth, the *devil* is the *master* of such families, and they *must* do what he would have them to do; they must be *thieves,* or *whoremongers,* or *sabbath-breakers,* or *murderers,* or any thing which will make them truly *his servants,* and bring them to him when they die.

SERM. LV.

I now come to consider the two cases which I proposed at the beginning; that is to say, *The case of such as have fallen into these sins, and are not sensible of the sad condition they are in;* and *the case of those that, being convinced of their danger, desire to be restored to God's favour.*

In speaking to *these particular cases,* I shall now only add what I think may be proper to *awaken you* to a *due care* of yourselves.

And first; know for certain, that it will be your *own fault* purely, if ever you shall be so unhappy as to fall into any of these vices. For, when God commands us to be *chaste,* and to avoid *fornication* and all *uncleanness,* He will enable us to do so, if we are not wanting on our part.

God knows all our weaknesses; He knows what temptations we are like to meet with; He knows what we can do ourselves, and what we ought to do, towards preserving our innocence; He knows that we shall want His grace; He has therefore bid us ask sincerely, and we shall have all the assistance that is needful for us. But then He commands us to be careful of ourselves; to live soberly; to keep out of the way of temptations as much as may be; and especially to avoid idleness and evil company; and then He will hear our prayers, and deliver us from the evil which we fear, and which we pray to be delivered from. And as you hope to keep yourselves pure from these foul crimes, keep a strict watch over your hearts.

It is the heart which is the fountain of all evil, as our Saviour has told us; and lewd thoughts and desires will produce lewd actions, if not resisted and cast out. "Keep thy heart with all diligence, for out of it are the issues of life."

Prov. 4. 23.

If people make a mock of these sins, think you thus with yourself: these people do not consider, that fornicators and adulterers cannot inherit the kingdom of heaven. If they did, it would certainly turn their laughter into sorrow and mourning.

If, to avoid fornication, you purpose to marry, remember, that "a prudent wife is from the Lord." And if so, you must pray to God to direct you, or never expect a happy choice.

Prov. 19. 14.

This is certainly the cause of so many miserable matches.

People go together without thoughts of God, and God leaves them to their own wilful choices. And what can one expect to follow, but hatred, strife, separation, and, too often, adultery?

To conclude: let this be seriously thought of; that all sins, and especially the sins of *fornication* and *adultery*, and such *foul* crimes, will meet with a due reward, one time or other. *If you sin against the Lord, your sin will surely find you out.* [Numb. 32. 23.] There is no hiding your crimes from God; no blotting them out of His remembrance; no escaping His severe justice; He can bring evils upon you, when you least expect them; come upon you like an armed man, not to be resisted; deprive you of the dearest blessings of your life, and make you "to possess the iniquities of your youth." Job 13. 26.

Be persuaded, therefore, good christians, to prevent your own misery; avoid temptations; mortify your corrupt affections, pray earnestly for grace, and grieve not the Holy Spirit by which you are sanctified; and you will escape all these evils, and, what is worse than all these, eternal death.

And do Thou, O God, rebuke the spirit of impurity that is gone out amongst us; preserve all those that are yet undefiled from all filthiness of flesh and spirit; make us all watchful over ourselves, and of those sins that do most easily beset us; that keeping ourselves pure, as Thy servants ought to be, we may, when we come to die, be admitted into the paradise of God, where no impure thing can enter.

Grant this, O heavenly Father, for Jesus Christ's sake. *Amen, Amen.*

SERMON LVI.

THE CAUSES AND THE REMEDIES OF MEN'S NEGLECTING THE CARE OF THEIR SALVATION.

O Lord and Master, suffer me not to forget my duty, both to save myself and them that hear me. Bless, I beseech Thee, this instruction, that both I and my flock may be thoroughly awakened by it; that we may so pass the remainder of our days to Thy honour, as to be always in that state in which we desire to be found at Thy coming; that we may not think of death with fear, but with the hopes of good servants, who humbly expect to be rewarded by Thee, O Jesus. Amen.

LUKE xiii. 8, 9.

See Matt. 21. 19; Luke 12. 36.

Lord, let it alone this year also, till I shall dig about it, and dung it: and if it bear fruit, well; and if not, then after that thou shalt cut it down.

I WILL read you the whole parable, that you may better understand the words I have made choice of for your present instruction.

"A certain man had a fig-tree planted in his vineyard; and he came and sought fruit thereon, and found none. Then said he unto the dresser of his vineyard, behold, these three years I come seeking fruit on this fig-tree and find none; cut it down; why cumbereth it the ground? And he answering said unto him, Lord, let it alone this year also, till I dig about it, and dung it; and if it bear fruit, well; and if not, then after that thou shalt cut it down."

I take it for granted, that not one who hears (and understands) me, but knows the meaning and intent of this parable. And can I read, or can you hear, these words, without having some such thoughts as these in your hearts?

'I have, by the favour of God, had some time of trial, in order to mend my corrupt nature, and to recommend myself to His favour, by good works, and fruits worthy of a place in the life He has given me; it very much concerns me, therefore, to consider what use I have made of my past time, and how I purpose to spend the remainder of my days; lest it should be determined in the decrees of God, *That this is to be the last year I am to live.*'

We see plainly, by this parable, that we are not sent into the world for nothing, no more than trees, which are designed for fruit, are suffered to grow, unless they are likely to bear fruit. And the most careless observer cannot but take notice of the great patience of God, who bears with His fruitless creatures, one year after another, while there is any hope that they will answer the end of their being sent into the world. And whoever is meant by *this dresser of the vineyard,* one cannot but admire His great charity, who can have so much compassion for those who have so little concern for themselves.

In the next place, you cannot but observe, that there is a determinate time, when God, the Lord of the vineyard, will bear no longer with His unfruitful creatures, after all the necessary methods and pains have been made use of to mend their nature, and to make them bear fruit answerable to amendment of life.

Lastly; the most thoughtless Christian cannot but take notice of the punishment of God's abused patience: "cut it down; why cumbereth it the ground?"

Would to God you would now join with me in making the best use of this very instructive parable; that we may not let one year after another pass over our heads without considering, that a few years *will certainly,* and even a few days *may,* put an end to our time of trial; and that then "the night cometh, when no man can work." [John 9. 4.]

Now, *a work* every soul of us have upon our hands,—a work that must be done before we die, or it had been better for us that we never had been born. And yet, when one looks into the world, one would be tempted to conclude, that few Christians *know,* and fewer *consider* this, or that they have any thing to do, but every one to follow their own natural

SERM. LVI.

inclinations; not remembering the sentence of God upon all mankind, "In the sweat of thy face shalt thou eat bread all the days of thy life;" a sentence designed, *in great mercy*, to make this world uneasy to us, that we may set our hearts upon a world where true ease and peace are to be found. *So great are the mischiefs, so great the sin, of an idle, useless life!*

[Gen. 3. 19.]

Indeed there is a diligence as *evil*, and even worse than doing nothing. There are people who even take pains to ruin themselves and others; there are too many whose whole lives are spent in laborious pleasures; and the most of all do labour hard for that which will not profit them in the end.

None of these, we may be sure, do answer the end of their creation, which is, *to glorify God, and to fit ourselves for that happiness for which we were made*.

This is what concerns us all to know and to think of, as ever we hope to be happy. This is *the fruit* expected from us; and for which only our lives are continued to us. And lastly, this is what the Apostle exhorts Christians earnestly to think of, "and to work out their salvation with fear and trembling;" that is, with a concern suitable to the work they have to do. Of which work take this short account:

[Phil. 2. 12.]

We have, every soul of us, dishonoured God by our sins; and therefore have offended Him, and must make our peace with Him, by a sincere repentance, and this forthwith, lest we should provoke Him to cut us off before we have done it.

We have, the very best of us, contracted too great a love for this world; and it will be expected, and will require time and pains, to wean our hearts from it, and to gain such tempers as are absolutely necessary to fit us for heaven.

We have, too many of us, contracted evil habits, and these we must get rid of, and that as soon as possible, lest we carry them with us into another world, for then we are ruined.

We stand in need of the grace of God every day of our lives; and if we do not every day of our lives pray for it, we have no reason to expect it.

We receive favours from God continually; and as we hope for the continuance of His blessings, we are obliged to give Him thanks as often as we receive them.

We are obliged to honour God by doing our duty in that state of life in which His providence has placed us.

Whether we are parents, or children; or masters, or servants; or magistrates, or pastors; or poor, or rich; all have their several duties, by discharging of which, as we ought to do, we honour God, and answer the end of our creation, and are fitting ourselves for a better life.

And we are not to forget that we shall meet with difficulties in the doing these several duties.

We have enemies to watch against; the devil, a very powerful spirit, seeking whom he may devour, finding them off their guard, or from under the protection of God; the world, a very corrupt world, tempting us to follow its ways, which lead to certain destruction; and lastly, our own corrupt hearts, powerfully inclining us to evil. So that we need not be at pains to be undone: we shall be undone of course, if we do not, through the great grace of God, strive to overcome these difficulties.

In short, that Christian who fancies that he has little or nothing to do, in order to be saved, and is at a loss how to spend his time, does not yet know what it is to be a Christian, and is in some danger of being treated as a fruitless tree: *Cut it down*, &c.

And were it not for the infinite goodness and patience of God, who waits for our amendment, this sentence would have been executed upon many who yet live, and have time given them to save themselves from ruin.

God (His Spirit assures us) "is not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance;" for He would have all men to be saved, and to come to the knowledge of the truth. He has declared, "that He has no pleasure in the death of sinners." And He so loved the world, that He gave His only-begotten Son, "that whosoever believeth in Him," and so believeth as to obey His laws, "shall not perish, but have everlasting life." [2 Pet. 3. 9; 1 Tim. 2. 4; Ezek. 18. 32; John 3. 16.]

What are all these most gracious declarations for, but to encourage sinners to lay hold of His mercy, while they have time given them to do it in? And they certainly abuse His goodness and patience, when they delay one moment to repent, and to lead holy lives.

And take notice, I beseech you, of what the Holy Spirit declares will be the punishment of those who despise the

SERM. LVI.

riches of His goodness and patience, and long-suffering; not considering that the goodness of God is intended to lead sinners to repentance. "They treasure up unto themselves wrath against the day of wrath;" than which there is nothing more severe nor more certain, however little sinners think of it.

[Rom. 2. 5.]

And for God's sake, let us all remember, what the Spirit assures us, "that there is a day of salvation, an accepted time;" that this day and this time passes away continually; and if we do not lay hold of it, the day of wrath will follow; that there *is a time when we may be heard*, and therefore a time when we shall not be heard; when the Spirit of God will no longer strive with us; when sinners have not been bettered by the means of grace and salvation offered them, but have long despised and resisted the Spirit of God, and grieved Him by their evil deeds. In short, there is a time when the *dresser of the vineyard* will no longer intercede for the fruitless tree, there being no longer hopes of its being bettered by His pains.

[2 Cor. 6. 2.]

Who this charitable dresser of the vineyard is, and what methods He takes to preserve His plantation from being cut down, we now come to consider.

Who can this be, but the Lord Jesus Christ, who is our Advocate with God, interceding for those whom He hath redeemed with His most precious blood; and who by His Holy Spirit, and by His ministers, is continually labouring to make us bring forth fruits worthy of a place in His vineyard; and to prevent, if possible, the being rooted up, and cast out to be burned? To this end, "He speaks once, yea twice, though men perceive it not;" by *mercies*, by *judgments*, by *disappointments;* by all other methods most likely to make us consider the end of our creation, and to pursue it with concern and zeal.

[Job 33. 14.]

It is He who sends His *ministers*, to *exhort*, to *warn*, to *give men notice*, of the threatened ruin, if they do not repent and amend their bad lives. They are these His ministers, who join with their Lord and Master, to beg of God to continue His patience towards the flock committed to their several charges; who remember you in their prayers to God for you; who beg of God to root out all growing vices, to

pardon what is past, and that iniquity may not be your ruin.

And happy is it for their flock when they do this; and woe to them if they do it not! for "they watch for your souls, as they that must give an account." [Heb. 13. 17.]

Which brings us to the next thing that this parable puts us in mind of: *the dreadful end of impenitent sinners.* "If it bear fruit, well; if not, after that thou shalt cut it down;" that is, I will intercede for it no longer; all the labour bestowed upon it is in vain; no fruit can be expected from it; it is only fit to be burned.

Would men but apply this to themselves, and suppose this should be their own case, it would make the stoutest heart to tremble.

But the great misfortune of too many is this; they will not believe that they are in so great danger, till it be too late to prevent it, till the axe is laid to the root of the tree, and it is just going to be cut down.

In short, you see, Christians, that there is an appointed time in which God offers grace to sinners, and an opportunity of working out their salvation, by glorifying God, and mending their corrupt nature; and that when this is neglected and past, they have nothing to expect but judgment without mercy.

It was this consideration that made the compassionate vine-dresser [our blessed Saviour] to weep over His vineyard [the people of Jerusalem] in these most sorrowful words: "Ah! happy had it been for thee, if thou hadst known in this thy day, the things that belong to thy peace; but now they are hid from thine eyes;" that is, by thine own sins and infidelity in not giving heed to the warnings thou hast had, thou hast at last provoked God to leave thee to thine own blindness, which will end in thy destruction. [Luke 19. 41, &c.]

Thus, my Christian brethren, matters stand with all of us. We are gone astray from God: God has appointed us a time in which to return to Him and to our duty; if we lose this time, we are certainly undone.

This is not what He desires, and therefore He spares us, a men capable of knowing their danger, and the way to avoid it; as we are told He did with the Canaanites; not that He Wisd. 12. 8, &c.

SERM. LVI.

was unable to have destroyed them at once, but that executing His judgments by little and little, He gave them space for repentance.

And thus He deals with all mankind; and they that perish, perish through their own perverse fault and blindness. They will not see the time and opportunities which God, the merciful God, affords them, in which to work out their salvation.

Have a little patience, and I will shew you the true reason of this; why we do not see and acknowledge the kindness and mercy of God in all the dispensations of His providence, which are designed to awaken and call us to our duty.

If He visits us with sickness, we consider it only as the pure effect of natural causes, and what every body is subject to, and which could not be avoided; though perhaps it was intended as the last call to repentance that ever we are to have.

If any thing befalls us that is very grievous to nature; as loss of children, of goods, or of limbs; we are apt to ascribe it to chance, mere chance; whereas nothing can happen to us, but by the order or permission of God; and it is designed for our good, if we could but be persuaded to consider it, either to awaken us when we grow careless, or to lead us to do our duty, or to punish us in this world that we may escape it in the next.

If the ministers of God warn you of the danger you are in by reason of your careless and very sinful lives, you are too apt to look upon it as their business to say such things, rather than your concern to lay them to heart.

If God gives you health, you are apt to forget that ever you must die; and if He lays you upon the bed of sickness, you are as apt to satisfy your minds with good resolutions, if ever you shall recover, which are too often forgot.

If He gives you uneasiness of mind, or trouble of conscience, you are impatient till you can cast off fear, and be as easy as the rest of the world; and if He gives you peace of mind, you conclude all is safe, and there is no need at all to fear.

But there is still another cause of men's blindness, and neglect of their salvation; and that is, a constant *hurry of*

worldly business, and success in it; it being utterly impossible to love God, when we love the world and its idols with all our hearts. Such people are too much distracted to hear their compassionate Redeemer asking them this concerning question, "What will it profit a man to gain the whole world, and lose his own soul?" [Matt. 16. 26.]

And if *business* is apt to blind us, much more will *success* in it do it effectually. The holy David confesseth, that this was his own case, and acknowledges God's great mercy in letting him see the danger he was in. "In my prosperity, I said, I shall never be removed; but Thou didst hide Thy face, and I was troubled;" and this trouble was of more use to him than all his prosperity. [Ps. 30. 6, 7.]

Want of humility, and a just fear for ourselves, is another and the greatest cause of our unfruitfulness under the means of grace and salvation.

We are apt to have a good opinion of our state, and therefore we fear no evil, nor see any danger. We say, with the Jews, we have Abraham to our father; so we have Jesus Christ for our Redeemer; and yet with that great advantage they became the most abandoned of all people. And ought it not to humble us, to consider how little we are better than they, with all the advantages we have, and do therefore boast of?

We that profess to believe that we are made for the everlasting possession of an heavenly Canaan, and yet seldom think of fitting ourselves for it; we that know we are made for the fellowship of Angels, and yet can be content with the pleasures proper to beasts; we that know that we have a time appointed to work out our salvation, and yet defer this mighty concern "till the night come when no man can work;" we that profess to believe an everlasting life of happiness or misery, and yet seldom consider which of the two is like to be our own portion; we that know that we are sinners, and yet do live as if we had never done amiss, or stand in no need of pardon; we that are in danger every moment to be snatched away, and are sure, if we die in our sins unrepented of, to be made the scorn of devils, and yet to be as unconcerned as if the command of life and death were in our own hands! [John 9. 4.]

SERM. LVI.

Gracious God! that these considerations might beget in us all a deep humility, that weighing the uncertainty of our days, and the work we have to do, the necessity of making our peace with God, and the comfort of living to bring forth fruit meet for salvation, our hearts may be filled with godly fear, and that we may see in this our day, and follow the things that make for our peace, lest they be for ever hid from our eyes!

But I would not only raise your passions and fears, without pointing out to you the true way of turning them to your advantage. Our Lord Himself has directed us what to do, when we are under a concern for what may become of us when we die. "Watch and pray, that ye may be accounted worthy to escape; for ye know not when your Lord cometh, whether at *even*, or at *midnight*, or at the *cock-crowing*, or in the *morning*."

[Luke 21. 36; Mark 13. 35.]

Why now, Christians, this is our appointed time; this is our day of salvation; which would not be continued to us, but that God waits to be gracious.

Our duty is to *watch* against sin, and the temptations that lead to it, and *pray* for grace, always remembering, that if we lead a careless, thoughtless life, our sentence is already passed, with that of the unfruitful tree: "Cut it down; why cumbereth it the ground?"

To put this command of our Saviour into practice, these few hints will be well worth your remembering:—*Lose not the sight of death; and forget not that it may come when you least think of it.*

You will then be apt to make good use of the present time; for who knows how short it may be? You will take every occasion of doing what good you can; for who can assure you that you shall ever have another? You will be moderate in your concern for the good things of this life, when you are so very soon to be possessed of pleasures that are to last for ever. You will be sober and temperate, lest that day should overtake *you*, as it has done many a one before you, when you have not your thoughts and senses about you. You will be more patient under afflictions, which God appoints for your good, since these cannot last very long. You will be kind and charitable according to your power, know-

ing that you are very soon to go to the treasure which you have laid up in heaven. You will more readily forgive all that have offended you; for why should you be enemies, when in a very little time you expect to meet in Paradise, and be friends there for ever? You will be inclined to be just to all men, and wrong none; for who would hazard his soul for that which he must so soon leave behind him?

In one word, you will be very serious; for so the thoughts of death will make you, of course. You will be generally devout; for who can think of another life, and not passionately wish and pray that his portion may be with the blessed when he dies?

And this is the only way to make our lives easy, and our death happy.

But is this care and concern necessary for all? Most certainly so. "What I say unto *you*, I say unto *all*, *Watch*," saith our Lord. [Mark 13. 37.]

The truth is this, and I pray you take notice and remember it; that before we leave this world, as we hope to go to a better, our corrupt nature must be changed, and we must endeavour, by the grace of God, to be restored to such a condition as man was at first created in, that we may be fit for the company of angels, and of just men made perfect.

And this is to be done, by forsaking every evil way, every known sin; by standing against the temptations we meet with; by denying our own corrupt desires, which would lead us to dishonour God; by making it part of our daily prayers to God, to give us a *new heart, new desires, greater strength,* and *better resolutions;* and lastly, by exercising ourselves in acts of piety and charity, that we may thereby recommend ourselves, as we certainly shall do, to God, for greater degrees of grace *here,* and for a favourable sentence at the day of judgment.

To conclude, with some short but useful observations: While we are alive, we have reason to hope, that the sentence of the unfruitful tree is not yet passed upon us; but then let us not forget, that when the door is shut, there is no longer time to cry for mercy.

And one thing, which is not so well considered as it ought to be, I must leave upon your memories: that at whatever

SERM. LVI.

distance the day of judgment may be off, yet *happiness* or *misery* will be the portion of every man and woman when they die. This is plain from the Word of God. Good men's souls are carried, as the soul of Lazarus was, by the angels into Paradise, a place of rest and peace: on the other hand, the souls of the wicked are carried to a place of misery and torment, as was that of the hard-hearted rich man; both the one and the other to be kept unto the judgment of the great day.

You will, I hope, expect no other arguments to persuade you to consider how you live, and how you die.

Remember, in the next place, that the time of death is kept from us, that we may be always thinking of it, always preparing for it, and that we may not forget the only thing for which we came into the world.

Indeed God, in the ways of His providence, puts us in mind of our latter end by a thousand instances and a thousand ways. People are every day going out of the world, of all ages, of all conditions, by all manner of ways; by *lingering*, *sudden*, and by *untimely* deaths. All these have passed their time of trial, and their souls are confined to their proper places of happiness or misery till the judgment of the great day.

This ought to affect us, if we would but consider how soon this *may* be, how soon it *must* be, our own case.

And may the good Spirit of God fix these truths in all our hearts; for Jesus Christ's sake. *Amen.*

SERMON LVII.

THE TRUE CHRISTIAN METHOD OF EDUCATING THE CHILDREN BOTH OF THE RICH AND THE POOR[a].

Acts xiii. 48.

As many as were ordained to [that is, disposed or prepared for] *eternal life, believed.*

The Charity Schools being designed to give the *children of the poor* not merely an *orderly education,* though that itself is a mighty blessing both to them and to the public; but more especially a *Christian education,* whereby they may become happy to all eternity; I cannot think of a more proper subject for this *solemn meeting,* than *this* I have made choice of; which intimates to us, *that there are certain dispositions necessary to qualify men for receiving and believing the Gospel to any saving purposes.* "As many as were ordained to," or prepared for, "eternal life, believed."

Having made this out, we shall then proceed to enquire—

First, *What those dispositions are?*

Secondly, *What manner of education is most proper to imprint them in the minds of those to whom the Gospel is proposed?* In order, in the first place, to prevent them from making shipwreck of the faith which they have once received; and, secondly, to oblige them to live according to the precepts of the Gospel which they have embraced.

But I must *first* observe to you, that this text has been sometimes made use of, to favour an opinion, which, if true, would render all education, with regard to another world,

[a] Preached in the year 1724, before the Society for promoting Christian Knowledge.

SERM. LVII.

entirely useless. The words *ordained to eternal life* having been understood to mean, that such as did not believe the Gospel to saving purposes, it was not their own faults; they *were not ordained to it,* nor to that eternal life to which a true faith in Jesus Christ entitles His servants; that they were never *effectually called* to believe the Gospel, and to obey its laws; that men are *born to unfortunate ends,* and to the ways that lead to them.

This has been an old complaint and refuge of sinners: [Prov. 19. 3.] "The foolishness of man" (saith Solomon) "perverteth his way, and his heart fretteth against the Lord." As if God could take pleasure in the destruction or misery of His creatures: an opinion so absurd, that I should not spend one moment of your time in confuting it, but that it is absolutely necessary, that such as are *candidates for eternity, of whom so great a number are now present,* as well as they that have the care of their education, should see the mischievous consequences of falling into an *error,* which would make God *the author of sin; His commands unjust; the Holy Scriptures inconsistent with themselves;* and render all the worthy endeavours of *parents,* of *masters,* and of the *societies* for educating of children, *useless,* and even *ridiculous.*

We need go no farther than two verses back, to see this error confuted by the Apostle himself. He there tells the *Jews,* that it was necessary (that is, God had so appointed it), that the Gospel should first be preached to them; but that they, *by putting the Word of God from them, did,* by that act, *render themselves unworthy of everlasting life.*

If to this we add the declarations which God Himself has [1 Tim. 2. 4; Ezek. 18. 32.] made: *that He would have all men to be saved, and to come to the knowledge of the truth; that He desireth not the death of a sinner, but that he should turn from his sin, and be saved;* we shall see plainly, that it is in the power of every soul, by the grace of God, to be happy, provided they put on firm resolutions of working out their own salvation with *fear and trembling;* that is, with a concern answerable to the loss they will otherwise sustain.

We may indeed, as many of the Jews did, reject the counsel of God for our good; but then our destruction will be from ourselves, and not from any decree of God.

The truth is, the word here translated *ordained,* signifies no more than *prepared,* or *disposed* for eternal life; and so it is translated in the margin of our Bibles: that is, they that were *well disposed;* they that *feared God,* and were afraid for themselves; they that did not resist the counsel and grace of God; these, when the Gospel was preached to them, very readily embraced it: while they that lived at all adventures, and feared no evil, who hated knowledge, and would not choose the fear of the Lord, such as these *would not, could not believe,* and consequently *could not be saved.*

This premised, we now come to consider the great truth intimated in the text:

I. *That there are certain dispositions necessary to fit men for receiving the Gospel to any saving purposes.*

Thus it was prophesied of the Messiah, before He appeared in the flesh, and foretold who would, and who would not receive Him: *The Lord hath anointed me to preach good tidings* [Isa. 61. 1.] *unto the meek,* for *they* would receive His message; *to bind up the broken-hearted,* for *they* would be glad of help and comfort; *to proclaim liberty to the captives,* for *they* and *they only* who should be sensible of their bondage, would be glad to be set at liberty.

Accordingly, when our Lord did come, He invited such to be His hearers, to whom He knew His doctrine would be acceptable. "Come unto Me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will refresh you." [Matt. 11. 28.] And when He was reproached for conversing with sinners, He only gave this answer, "They that are whole need not a physician, but they that are sick: I came not to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance." [Luke 5. 31.]

Why, were not they all sinners? Yes. But that which is intimated in this answer is this, that there are sinners who are not at all sensible of their bad condition: and their condition, for that very reason, is the more deplorable, because they would not look out for help; while such as feared God, and were in fear for themselves, were exceedingly pleased to hear our Lord declare, that "He came from God, to seek and to save that which was lost." [Luke 19. 10.] These, and these only, heard Him with patience; considered the tendency of His doctrine; examined His miracles without prejudice; and

SERM. LVII.

were at last convinced, that *He was indeed a teacher come from God;* that *He had the words of eternal life;* that He made known things of the greatest concern to them. They therefore embraced His doctrine, and resolved to obey His laws.

[John 3. 2; 6. 68.]

The Apostles followed their Master in this exactly, and proposed the Gospel to such as were previously disposed to receive it: "Whoever among you feareth God, to you is the word of this salvation sent;" and such, and such only, did receive it. The Centurion, amongst others, was an instance of this, and of God's purpose and goodness to all such as improve that light and grace which He vouchsafes them. He was a *devout man, feared God, gave much alms, and prayed to God continually;* and, being thus prepared for greater mercies, God, by a providence extraordinary, brought him to a knowledge of the Gospel.

Acts 13. 26.

[Acts 10. 2.]

On the other hand, we find too many of the Jews so prejudiced against Christ and His doctrine, that nothing could convince them, no not miracles themselves. A remarkable instance of this we have in the fourth chapter of the Acts of the Apostles; the Apostles having cured a man that was lame from his mother's womb; and this only by saying the word, and it was done: a sure proof that God was with them, because this was the very way by which He had created the heavens and the earth. The Scribes and the Pharisees saw this: *We cannot,* say they, *deny it;* neither could they say, that the doctrine the Apostles preached was unworthy of God. And what was the consequence of this? Why, indeed, a very strange one. *They ordered them not to speak any more in the Name of Christ* (that very Name by which the man had been made whole); and threatened them severely, if they should do so.

[ver. 16. 18.]

Which history will be an eternal testimony against those who are ever calling for more evidence, and making objections against received truths; when it is plainly their own *obstinacy,* their *prejudice,* or their *wickedness,* which hinders them from perceiving the truth,—that truth which is *worthy of all men to be received;* the interest of all men to embrace it; and which having been so clearly revealed, and abundantly confirmed, leaves all men without excuse, who shall reject it.

[1 Tim. 1. 15.]

For after all, reject it men will, if their minds are not prepared to receive it. "If our Gospel," saith the Apostle, "be hid," if it will not be received, "it is hid to them that are lost; whom the god of this world has blinded." 2 Cor. 4. 3.

So that it can never be an objection against the Christian Religion, that all men, so soon as the Gospel is preached to them, do not see the truth, and close with its most gracious offers of pardon and happiness: for if men are not disposed to be serious; if they are engaged in sinful courses; if they shun that light which would shew them to themselves; and despise those means which God has ordained for their conversion; it is no wonder they do not, nay it is impossible they should, believe the Gospel.

And this comes to pass, *not by any fatal decree of God,* but from an utter indisposition to hearken to the truth, and to see their interest in it. And it is also occasioned by a custom of acting against reason and conscience; by leading a life contrary to holiness; by grieving the Holy Spirit of God, by which they had been sanctified; and making it their choice not to see the consequence of a life spent in ignorance and sin.

For this reason it is, that children are the most proper subjects of an *education* which regards *another life,* before they have been suffered to grow wild; before their souls shall have been *polluted,* their senses *depraved,* their minds and memories *corrupted,* by evil principles, and evil examples; for when it is thus with them, we shall find it the hardest thing in the world to persuade them even to hear what we have to say on the part of religion.

Whereas, they that have the happiness of being restrained betimes, and trained up in the fear of God, these will hear and receive with meekness the ingrafted Word, which is able to save their souls.

And it is for this reason, that the great *enemy of souls* has of late been most indefatigably industrious, and has set all his agents at work, to vilify and decry this method of instruction, and the *Charity Schools,* which are designed to give the children of the poor an early knowledge of God and of their duty, before sin and hell have got dominion over them.

But this should not discourage those who are engaged in

SERM. LVII.

this good work, a work which, if it had not been of God, would have come to nought long ere this, considering the malice of Satan, and the restless endeavours of his instruments, to bring an evil report upon it: which, instead of making us uneasy, or weary in well-doing, will only oblige us to consider with attention, what has been, or can be, objected against these schools of piety; and to resolve to use our utmost endeavours to make them effectually answer all the ends of charity proposed by those that *manage*, and by those that shall *contribute* towards supporting them.

Now, as we are sincere *advocates* for this charity, so must we be faithful *monitors*, and always put you in mind, that the first and great *design* of these *schools* is to make children Christians in *deed* as well as in *name*; lest not knowing, or not feeling, the power of religion in their souls, they fall into the vices of the age, and become a scandal to their education, and a real grief and offence to all that have contributed towards carrying it on.

My meaning is this: children may be, and often have been, taught the general *truths* and *duties* of *Christianity*, without any great good following, for want of such previous *knowledge* and *dispositions* as we have been speaking of, such as are necessary to fit them for receiving the *truth* in the *love* of it.

II. *What this knowledge, and these dispositions are*, we now come to consider.

[Prov. 9. 10.]

And first; as "the fear of God is the beginning of wisdom;" so are *the fear of God*, and *the knowledge of ourselves*, the foundation of saving faith in Jesus Christ. "To you that

Mal. 4. 2.

fear God (saith the Prophet) He will arise with healing in His wings." He may indeed be seen by others, but He comes *with healing in His wings* to those only *who fear God.*

Jesus cried, "If any man thirst, let him come unto Me, and drink;" plainly intimating, that people must have *a sense of their wants*, they must have *an appetite*, before they can so much as think of going to the living waters to quench

Rev. 3. 17.

their thirst. "Thou sayest, (saith the Spirit,) that I am rich; and knowest not that thou art wretched, and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked:" a sad condition indeed, to be miserable without knowing it, and consequently without any inclination to look out for help!

But then is not this the case of the greatest part of mankind? And *ought not the cure of this malady to begin here?* Especially with respect to those that are professedly taken in hand to be delivered from this state of blindness and misery.

Should not this be our first and great concern, *to plant the fear of God in their hearts betimes,* by giving them a just and distinct knowledge of God and His attributes; by making them sensible of the relation they bear to Him, and that they are accountable to His justice for every thing they do; by explaining to them the condition they are brought into by the fall of our first parents; by shewing them to themselves, and convincing them, from their own reason and experience, that things are wretchedly amiss with them, that they are by nature under the power and dominion of sin, and that if they were left to themselves, they would go on to obey it to their eternal ruin; that people need not be at pains to make themselves miserable, for they will be so of course if they make no resistance? In short, by making them *see and feel the sad estate they are in without the blessing of a Redeemer,* we shall lay a good foundation for saving knowledge. But without that, the general duties of the Christian Religion may be taught without effect. And they that hear them may live in a formal profession of Christianity all their days, and die in a condition not better than that of infidels.

Do but attend to what I am going to say, and you will be convinced, that this is the *likeliest,* if not the *only* way, both *to convert,* and *to confirm them* in the ways of religion and virtue; namely, to open their eyes, that they may see with whom they have to do; and that they may perceive how unworthy they are of the least of the mercies God designs for them; and how liable they are to be for ever undone, if they are not careful for themselves.

For, first, *this is the likeliest way to convert them;* by bringing them to a *seriousness of temper,* than which nothing is more necessary to a true conversion; by representing to their minds *things of the greatest concern to them;* the *value of their souls,* which they ought not to hazard, *though they were to get the whole world;* the happiness they are made for, and the misery they may bring upon themselves, if they shall oppose God's gracious design towards them.

SERM. LVII.

The consideration of these things often set before them will not suffer them to be indifferent; they will learn to be afraid for themselves; and they will consider with attention, what is their true interest, and WHAT THEY MUST DO TO BE SAVED. *Fear* being that passion which God makes use of to make all His other graces effectual. Even *Noah* himself, great as his faith was, stood in need of this passion, to make him do what God had commanded him, to save himself from perishing: "Moved with fear," saith the Apostle, "he prepared an ark for the saving of his house."

Heb. 11. 7.

Besides, it is *this disposition* which must make them fit objects of God's grace and compassion: "To this man will I look," saith the Lord, "even to him that trembleth at My word."

Isa. 66. 2.

If to this we add, that it is *this grace*, and this only, that can make repentance and a religious life *less discouraging* and *burdensome* than they are apt to appear to an unregenerate mind, we shall still see more reason to press it upon those whom we are about to instruct unto eternal life.

To deny themselves a great many things for which they are naturally very fond; *to mortify their lusts and affections*, which are as dear to them as their lives; *to take up the cross*, even before it is laid upon them: these are duties which corrupt nature would avoid, if God, by putting His fear into their hearts, did not shew them the danger and the necessity of doing any thing to escape it.

And here one cannot but wonder at those, who, for the most part forgetting this only sure argument of conversion, do hope to persuade people to forsake their sins, and lead a religious life, by arguments purely *moral*, or on account of *worldly inconveniencies*: you will ruin your reputation, your health, your estate; you will disoblige your friends. On the other hand, *virtue is its own reward*. How honourable is it to be just to one's word, and true in one's dealings! How unworthy a rational man to live like a beast!

One may very well question, whether any man, ever since the fall of Adam, was converted by arguments of this nature. Alas! our corrupt hearts will easily get over every thing that can be said which only regards this world. But who can be so hardy as to slight *eternal ruin*; or despise *His* power,

and *His* displeasure, *who can destroy both body and soul in hell;* when represented in terms suited to the *capacities* of those to whom we speak, and pressed upon them with becoming *seriousness?* Matt. 10. 28.

It is for this reason, and because of ourselves we have so little inclination to consider, as well as little power to choose what is good, that God in His holy Word, both in the Old and New Testament, has so frequently set before us the terrors of the Lord, and of the world to come; that He has made known to us the certain miserable portion of the wicked in a future state, in order to awaken us, to fill our hearts with fears of future evils, while we continue impenitent; to make us *serious;* to make the pleasures of the world less palatable; to break the power of temptations; or, in one word, *to dispose us for eternal life.*

Neither is it of less use *to confirm them in the ways of virtue and piety.* For it will represent to their minds the dangers they have escaped, the sad condition they had been in, had not God vouchsafed them the grace of repentance; which will be a means of curing them of that carelessness and presumption that are the ruin of an infinite number of souls. And seeing the circumstances of this life, as well as the commands of Jesus Christ, require that Christians should be always upon their guard, nothing but a great fear of miscarrying could reconcile them to a duty so uneasy to flesh and blood.

But above all things, this *fear* will create in young people a tenderness of conscience, than which nothing will be of greater use in the whole course of their lives, to preserve them from falling. Temptations may be sudden; they may not always have time to consider the evil tendency of actions, may not always know what their duty requires of them; but if their conscience is tender and awake, they will be sure to keep at the greatest distance from every thing they have reason to fear may offend God; which will often serve instead of time to consider, instead of knowledge to direct, instead of friends to advise with, in time of danger.

Besides these, there is one other good effect this *fear* will have upon those who are early possessed of it; and this is, *it will oblige them to live in a constant dependance upon God;* to

SERM. LVII.

be ever looking up to Him for pardon and grace, for light and assistance, for protection against their adversaries, and against that *security*, the fruits of which are, *negligence, a bold venturing upon temptations, a wicked life, and a reprobate mind.*

I will only add, that this method of education appears to me to be *the very shortest way of giving children a thorough knowledge of their duty both to God and man.* For besides this, that it gives God the first possession of their hearts, (which is sure no small advantage,) it determines their choice betimes; makes them afraid of the dangers that surround them, and gives them an abhorrence of those vices which are so dangerous even to be acquainted with; and which one needs but once taste of, to become for ever slaves to them.

But then if we consider the age, and the slow capacities of those we have to deal with; the many precepts of the Gospel, and the different circumstances of life, wherein they are to be applied; we should utterly despair of giving them a full sight and knowledge of their duty, had not God directed us to this short method: to teach them first of all to *fear Him;* which will supply the want of a great deal of *learning*, a good memory, and a great deal of time, which every body cannot be master of.

So that *natural conscience*, the general *rules of religion*, as they are summed up in our catechism, and which every body may learn; these, assisted by the *fear of God*, will be sufficient to direct any Christian in any state of life, in which the providence of God shall place him.

And indeed, as it is but too sure that very many make a shift, with *good parts*, and a *great deal of learning*, to be eternally ruined; so, to the praise of God be it said, we often see many poor people, with *very small attainments*,—but who have been bred up in the *fear of God*,—as true lovers of God, as careful not to offend Him, as constant and devout in worshipping Him, as just and conscientious in their dealings with men, and as sober and temperate in their lives; and consequently have as good a title to the blessings of Paradise, and the kingdom of Heaven, as they that have had the greatest advantages of learning and education.

In short; *this foundation being once well laid*, all other

Christian graces and virtues will follow of course. We shall love God proportionably to the mercies we are sensible we have received from Him, and the dangers from which He has delivered us; we shall hope for all favourable allowances from Him, whom we know, we fear, and love; we shall honour Him, and every thing that relates to Him; and we shall serve Him truly all our days. And being convinced, that God has made the *love of our neighbour* a proof of our fear and love of Him, we shall always be afraid of doing any of those things to others, which He hates and has forbidden.

Lastly; knowing that our bodies are the temples of the living God, we shall endeavour to keep them holy and undefiled, as the temples of God should be; and shall always be afraid of profaning and polluting them, and of doing any of those vile things which may drive the Spirit of God from His temple, and leave it to be possessed by devils.

But I must not tire your patience; and therefore I proceed, in the last place, to consider,

III. *What manner of education is most proper to imprint the fear of God in the hearts of those whom we undertake to instruct;* in order to prevent them, if possible, from making shipwreck of the faith which they have once received; and to oblige them to live according to the precepts of the Gospel which they have embraced.

There is indeed one truth, which, if it would be believed, would make people more desirous to learn their duty, than any body could be to teach them; and that is, *that a virtuous education is really preferable to all the wealth and other advantages of the world without it.*

But forasmuch as this will very hardly be received, we must take another method, and endeavour to possess people's hearts with the *fear of God,* and a *fear of themselves,* in order to prevail with them to lead a godly and a Christian life. We must, for instance, set before them the power and majesty of that God with whom they have to do; that all His laws are holy, just, and good; that therefore He expects obedience to them; that He sees all their actions, hears all their words, and knows the very thoughts of their hearts; that though He is infinitely good and merciful, yet that He can be angry

SERM. LVII.

with sinners, and severely too, as is plain from the many judgments recorded in Scripture for our example; and that He will call all men to an account for the talents He has given them. That not only wicked, but unprofitable servants will then be punished. *That therefore it is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God.* And that God has made these truths known to them, on purpose that they may not ruin themselves eternally.

[Heb. 10. 31.]

Let them therefore be taught to live always as in the presence of God, as the most effectual way to preserve in their hearts a sense of their dependence upon Him. *Walk before Me, and be thou perfect,* is a rule given by God Himself; it is a rule that the most ignorant will be able to apply in all the circumstances of life; and the most learned cannot have a better.

[Gen. 17. 1.]

You are in the presence of God. He is present therefore to punish you, if you break His laws; He is present to reward you, if you do your best to please Him; He is present to assist you, when you want help; He is present to defend you against all your adversaries. So that life and death are set before you.

They are then to be made acquainted with their own condition; what they are by nature; what they would be, if left entirely to themselves; what they may hope for, by giving themselves up to God; and what will certainly be the consequence of their living without God in the world. *That they are by nature born in sin, and the children of wrath,* is what they often hear, and often repeat; but then they should know, that *to be born in sin,* is to come into the world a creature in whom God can take no pleasure; a creature in whom are the seeds of all manner of wickedness, ready to spring up, and bring him to destruction both of soul and body; a creature no more able to help himself out of this sad estate, than a man that is dead; and that yet he must be delivered out of this estate before he leaves this world, or he will remain under the power of everlasting death, of everlasting misery.

For this they ought to know further, that they are not only *born in sin,* but by conversing with others as corrupt as themselves, they will become still more wicked the longer they

live, and more offensive to God, if not restrained by His grace. It will be easy to convince them of this, by obliging them to consider those many people over whom sin and Satan have got the dominion; how they are slaves to the most unreasonable passions; and having sold themselves *to work wickedness,* they are at last come to that pass, *that they cannot cease from sin.* So that neither the fear of temporal nor eternal punishments can restrain them. [2 Pet. 2. 14.]

Then let them see the folly of that most common delusion, that it is *impossible* they should ever fall into the *abominable sins* they see, and every day hear others guilty of,—a delusion, that has been the ruin of an infinite number of souls.

Let them know, therefore, that nobody was ever extremely graceless and wicked at once; that one sin makes way for and brings on another; that every one who lives in any known sin is advancing to a state of atheism, of wishing *that there were no God,* and at last of living as if there were none; that they are of the very same race and make with those very people, whose wickednesses they are astonished at; and that the same evil spirit, that tempted them to those abominations, is *ever walking about like a roaring lion, seeking whom he may* be permitted *to devour.* [1 Pet. 5. 8.]

Lastly; let this truth be often inculcated, that *we are not so much masters of ourselves as we are apt to imagine:* governed we must be, either by the Spirit of God, or by an evil spirit; and that whenever men grieve the Holy Spirit, and provoke Him to withdraw His protection, that moment Satan takes them under his power, and, as the Scriptures speak, *leads them captive at his will.* [2 Tim. 2. 26.]

These considerations, if any thing, will make young people afraid for themselves, especially if they are often put in mind, that a very few years will determine their fate for ever, and they will be happy or miserable to all eternity.

But will not this way of dealing with children make them *melancholy?* By no means. It may make them *serious,* and *that* they ought to be; and they ought to be so betimes, lest they be never so as long as they live. That which makes people melancholy is, when they have wrong apprehensions of God, as if He had ordained them for *misery;* or when they are shewn the danger they are in, without the way to

SERM. LVII.

escape. This indeed would be a ready way to drive them to despair.

But when, at the same time that they see the bad estate they are in by nature, they are made to understand the gracious goodness of God in the manner of their redemption; how He sent His only Son to take our nature upon Him, in order to deliver us from this state of sin and misery; that He is in Him *reconciling the world unto Himself;* that for His sake He will overlook the untowardness of our nature; restore us to His favour; give us all the aids necessary to do what He requires of us; and that, if we continue to serve Him faithfully all our days, He will make us happy for ever; there will then be no reason for *melancholy*, much less for *despair*.

[2 Cor. 5. 19.]

But, on the contrary, they that are thus instructed will easily perceive the *reasonableness* and the necessity of all the duties which Christianity requires of them, and will readily close with them, whenever they are proposed to them. They will see, for instance, and be sensibly affected with the love and kindness of God in touching their hearts with a sense of the danger they were in, which must needs be very great, since *none but the Son of God could deliver them.* They will highly value the favour of their deliverance, as they will have reason to do; and this will very naturally lead them *to love the Lord their God with all their heart*, and to do what they believe will please Him, though it should thwart their own inclinations.

When they shall be convinced, as they ought to be, that God requires obedience to His laws, for this reason only, that we may not be miserable, they will avoid every sin He has forbidden, not because it is scandalous, or punishable by man, but because it will *displease God*, and because it will utterly unfit them for heaven and happiness.

When once they have been made sensible, what little power they had to deliver themselves out of that sad estate in which sin had involved them, they will see it highly reasonable to give all the glory of their deliverance to God; and to cast themselves entirely upon Him for grace and strength to carry them through all future difficulties and dangers. And this will very naturally lead them to *pray to*

Him continually to deliver them from a *corrupt world, infinite errors,* and most *powerful enemies,* which they are sure to meet with in their way to heaven.

If they have been made truly sensible of the *corruption, weakness,* and the *inconstancy* of their *nature,* and that Satan is ever ready to tempt them to their ruin, they will see, and they will acknowledge, the *reasonableness,* and the absolute *necessity* of *mortification* and *self-denial,* of watching and walking warily all their days.

Whenever they are in danger of *backsliding,* they will be put in mind of the sad condition of that man in the Gospel, whom our Lord has mentioned for our warning, to whom an evil spirit, after he had been turned out, returned with seven other spirits more wicked than himself; how the *last estate of that man was worse than the first.* [Luke 11. 26.]

And having been often told, as they should be, that whenever the Spirit of God forsakes them, an evil spirit will take the government of them; and that every wilful sin sets them further out of God's favour, and gives the devil still more power over them; whenever they shall have done amiss, they will immediately ask pardon, that they may not put themselves out of God's protection.

In one word; they will not look upon Christianity as *a state of idleness,* but consider it, as indeed it is, as *a state of trial,* in which they are placed for a very short while, in order to be restored to the *image of God,* in which they were at first created; and that if they lose this opportunity, they are for ever undone. And when they see so many about them in the very *way of perdition,* they will bless God for the happy providence, and for all those whom He has made instruments of their conversion, before evil habits were become a second nature, before evil conversation had corrupted their manners, or evil company their principles.

And it is much to be wished, that they who stand charged with the *education* of those of *better circumstances* than those we are now concerned for, would seriously consider, whether it is not for want of laying this foundation,—for want of possessing their souls betimes with the *fear of God,* and with a concern for their everlasting welfare,—that that *learning,* and other *accomplishments,* which are intended to qualify

SERM. LVII. them for passing through the world with reputation and advantage, do only prove a greater snare to them.

For it is too plain to be denied, that very many of those whom God has distinguished by *honours*, liberal *educations*, and great *estates*, are extremely corrupted by these *advantages;* they are often too *learned* to be instructed by their proper teachers, too *great* to be reproved when they are in an error, too *high* to submit to the laws of the Gospel, or too much taken up with the affairs of this world, to be seriously concerned for that which is to come. And all this, for want of being first instructed in the *fear of God*, and the dangers they are exposed to, if they should be so unhappy as to follow their own inclinations; for want of being humbled with the knowledge of the majesty of God, who putteth down one, and setteth up another; for want of knowing the dangers and the temptations of an high estate; for want of being convinced that they are as much subject to the laws of Christ, and as liable to be eternally ruined if they are not so, as the meanest on earth: for want of being often told, that the more they have, the more they are to answer for; and lastly, for want of being made sensible of the vile *ingratitude* of living only to dishonour their great benefactor.

We are obliged to say it again; it is the want of this kind of *instruction* that is the source of that corruption which spreads itself so universally; while a superficial knowledge of the Christian Religion, of the commands of God, and of the way of worshipping Him, is called a *Christian education*. And therefore it much concerns all those whose hearts God has moved to set up these *schools of charity*, to see, that the children, in them at least, be taught in the first place to *fear God;* to know, and to be *afraid* for themselves, and of His *judgments*. And then we might hope to see a number of young people sober and serious in their behaviour, and when grown up, peaceable in their lives, upright in their dealings, obedient to their governors, and *examples of piety* to all about them.

And what encouragement would all good Christians have to contribute, upon every occasion, towards carrying on so excellent a work! With what grateful hearts would poor *parents* embrace these opportunities of having their children

taught, not only how to live, but how to be for ever happy! What thankful *returns* would many of these make, if ever God should enable them, in contributing towards the Christian education of others! And lastly, how much concerned would our governors be, to give all the encouragement imaginable to these worthy undertakings, and severely punish those who shall endeavour to blast so good a design!

For indeed, it is *true religion that must support the state;* not only as it is a means of averting God's judgments, but as it is the most effectual means of keeping men within the bounds of duty and obedience; *the fear of God being the only sure principle of loyalty to be depended on.* The *fear of death* itself being but a poor restraint, in comparison of the *dread of God's displeasure,* when once the heart is possessed with a just sense of it.

And if ever we shall be so happy as to have the generality of our youth thus educated, the *civil government* will soon find its interest in it. They that shall be taught to *fear God* will as surely *honour the king,* and them that are put in authority under him. Men will obey those that have the rule over them, not only for *wrath*—for fear of temporal punishment; but for *conscience sake*—for fear of offending God. The *sacredness* of *oaths* will be more regarded, and Christians will study to *be quiet,* and *to do their own business,* and leave the government of the world to those on whom the providence of God has laid that burden. [1 Pet. 2. 17; Rom. 13. 5.]

And though the corruption of human nature will always make laws, and civil penalties, and magistrates to put them in execution and to decree justice, necessary; yet this burden will become every day lighter, when the number of *untaught* and *undisciplined* people shall be lessened; when subjects shall become peaceable, because of *the oath of God* which is upon them; when men shall make it their choice to be just to one another, knowing *the account they must one day give;* and, being convinced that this is not the world they were made for, when they shall be afraid of losing the eternal happiness of the next, by being too passionately fond of this.

In short; there is no governing the *outward,* without first governing the *inward* man. "Out of the heart," saith our Matt. 15. 19.

SERM. LVII.

Saviour, "proceed evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, thefts, false witness, blasphemies."

Now, where the fear of God is, there is no room for any of these to enter; and this is the reason that I have with so much *earnestness*, and I am afraid *tediousness*, recommended a *method of education*, which, if religiously pursued, would in all probability promote these great ends; the *glory of God*, the *good of mankind*, the *happiness of this life*, and the *blessings of the world to come*.

SERMON LVIII.

ON THE DUE OBSERVANCE OF THE SABBATH.

EXODUS xx. 11.

The Lord blessed the Sabbath day, and hallowed it.

THE meaning of these words is this: The Lord having commanded one day in seven to be kept holy, and having made it a *Sabbath,* that is, a day of rest from bodily and unnecessary labour, *He hath blessed that day;* that is, He hath joined a blessing to the due observation of it. How then comes it to pass, that *this day* is not observed with great strictness, devotion, and thankfulness? Why, because people do not consider either the necessity, or the reason, or the advantage, of such a command. I will therefore, before I go any farther, endeavour to make you sensible of the reason and the necessity of observing one day in a week according to the commandment.

We are all satisfied, that we ought not to forget the God that made us; that we ought not to forget that we are *needy, sinful, helpless* creatures. Now, it is certain, we should soon forget these things, if, one day in seven, we were not put in mind of them. To shew you that we most certainly should do so, let us consider how many things every one of us have forgot, which we ought to have remembered. How many mercies do men receive from God, which they soon forget? How many judgments doth God send into the world, which are no longer thought on, than whilst the smart of them does last? Why, we should as surely forget the God who sends mercies and judgments, if we were not taught continually to remember Him by His day which we keep holy.

SERM. LVIII.

There are at this day many nations in the world, which know nothing of the true God. How comes this to pass? They were all the offspring of one man, the righteous Noah, who taught his children and posterity to know God, and to worship Him aright.

But you may learn from hence, that it is possible and natural for people, for whole nations, to forget the true God. And thus it would really happen to us, if we had not days set apart, and men appointed, to keep up the knowledge and remembrance of God in our minds.

How soon do we forget our very best friends, our very children, when they have been a while dead and out of our sight? As surely should we forget that there is a God; that we depend upon Him for every thing we have or hope for; that we ought to worship Him, to give Him thanks, and to put our whole trust in Him; that we shall be judged by Him at the last day. All which we should soon forget, if we were not often called upon and put in mind of our duty.

[Ps. 30. 6.] The Psalmist tells us, that *in his prosperity* he himself forgot God; and do not we see every day, that people who are too much busied with the cares of this world, do almost forget that there is a world to come?

What would they do, if they were not commanded upon the Lord's day to lay aside the business and the cares of this life, and for a while think of a better? Why, they would soon forget that there is a better; they would set up their rest here; they would only provide for themselves, and their children, an earthly maintenance, and never think of heaven.

It is too plain, all men would do so, were they left to themselves, because too many do so, notwithstanding the means of grace afforded them for their instruction and remembrance.

But why one day in seven, rather than any other portion of our time? Why, because God has so ordered it. That is the best answer I can give; and every man will be satisfied with this answer, who has a mind to submit to the wisdom of God, and will believe that He does every thing for the best.

It may be, you may think, that every body, knowing it to be their duty to serve God, would, if they were left to them-

selves, choose a time to do it. Why, do not we all know that *fasting* is a Christian duty; and yet, because God has not in express words appointed us certain times of fasting, how few are there who observe any at all? And though the Church of God has appointed days of fasting, yet they are neglected, despised, and the very duty itself questioned, and almost forgotten. And so it would be with the Lord's day, and the Lord Himself, if it were not expressly the command of God, REMEMBER THAT THOU KEEP HOLY THE SABBATH-DAY.

One might give many more reasons; but these are sufficient to shew the necessity of observing the Lord's day to keep it holy. I will therefore conclude this particular with a relation which may, perhaps, be better understood by you, and better remembered, than what I have already said.

There was a certain person, who had a thoughtless and extravagant young man to his son. The father upon his death-bed, made his son solemnly promise, that he would spend one half hour every day by himself. So easy a request, from a kind father, was very cheerfully obeyed, though it was troublesome for one who had seldom been alone, to be restrained, though for so short a time. The son at first did not see his father's meaning, or the reason of such a command, till at last, being often alone, he began to think of himself; which, by the grace of God, ended in his conversion, and then he did not only retire because his father had commanded him, but because he found it reasonable, his duty, and pleasure, so to do.

And shall we not believe, that this command of God has very often the same blessed effect? And many thousands there are in heaven, and many, no doubt, yet on earth, who by being obliged *by this command* to wait upon God at His house, have there found the means and the reasons of their conversion and salvation.

And, now, pray consider, whether God is not kind and merciful, in giving us a law which is of so great advantage to mankind; in commanding us to keep holy one day in seven, that, being taken from all worldly labour, we may, in a manner, be obliged to think of Him, of heaven, and of our eternal welfare?

To come therefore to the words of the text, "The Lord

SERM. LVIII.

blessed the sabbath-day, and hallowed it;" which we may consider either as a *command,* or a *blessing.*

I. If we consider them as *a command,* it is a wonder that ever such a command should be neglected by any man who is in his right mind. Pray do but go along with me in considering two things; *first,* who it is that has given this command; *secondly,* to whom this command is given.

First; The Lord of heaven and earth, whose blessing alone maketh rich, who commandeth the heavens and they obey Him; by whose providence the world is governed and preserved; who holdeth our soul in life; who alone can forgive sins; who giveth food to all flesh; who causeth grass to grow for the cattle, and herb for the service of men; in whose hands our breath is, and whose are all our ways; who is able to do exceedingly abundant for us, more than we can ask or think; this great and good God has commanded us to observe religiously one day in seven.

Secondly; But what are WE to whom this is commanded? Why, we are creatures who cannot live one hour without God's blessing; we are poor, weak, frail, perishing creatures, liable to a thousand miseries; to ignorance, to want, to sickness, to sin, to death.

But what is it which God has commanded us? Why, that one day in seven we should leave all our worldly concerns in His hands; that we should go to the public congregation, where, meeting many such helpless creatures as ourselves, we should acknowledge our own unworthiness, our own weakness, and the little power we have to help ourselves; we should there confess, that God only can succour and preserve us; that without His great mercy, we are, and are like to be, miserable; and therefore we are all to join our prayers, beseeching God to pardon our sins, to pity our infirmities, to enlighten our minds with saving truth, to give us grace and strength to serve Him acceptably, and for His own goodness sake, for His promise sake, and for the sake of Jesus Christ, to save our souls in the life to come.

In the mean time, we are to pray to Him constantly, that He would be pleased to remove from us all such public calamities as we shall at any time labour under, or that He would make them useful for our eternal welfare, and give us

such common blessings as we should most stand in need of: all which He has encouraged us to ask for, and has promised to be found of them that diligently seek Him.

Lay these things together: God, who stands not in need of our service, has for our own good commanded us to keep holy one day in seven; He has commanded us on that day to leave our business in His hands, and instead of working for our daily bread, only to pray for it, and for whatever else we want. We are satisfied, that without His blessing, it is to no purpose to rise early, and take late rest; that His blessing upon one day's labour is of more value than the whole week's work without His blessing; that therefore it is necessary we should observe this command of God, to serve Him upon His own day, if we look for success in this world, or happiness in the next.

In short, God has commanded this good day to be observed, that men may never forget to whom they ought to go for help and salvation; that men may not forget God; and God has promised not to forget them. "Lord, what is [Ps. 8. 4.] man, that Thou hast such respect unto him, or the son of man, that Thou shouldst so regard him?" But what is man, if he despise such love, such consideration, such happiness?

II. We have now considered the *command.* Let us proceed to consider the *blessing that attends it,* where it is conscientiously observed.

And first, it will be a means of bringing a blessing upon every man's private affairs; which will prosper the better the more religiously the Lord's day is observed. Christ has expressly promised, that if we "seek the kingdom of God, [Matt. 6. 33.] and His righteousness," all the necessary things of this life shall be added unto us. And if we truly believe what the Scriptures have made known to us, and indeed what we find by experience, that "except the Lord build the house, their [Ps. 127. 1.] labour is but lost that build it;" we shall never look for success, nor a blessing, to come upon what we undertake, but when we carefully keep His commands, and remember to keep holy the Lord's day; which, if we do, it will be a means of sanctifying the rest of the days of the week.

And indeed we have no right to the rest of the week,

SERM. LVIII.

unless we first employ this day in the service of God. He that permits us to labour six days (and who alone can make our labours prosper) has reserved one in seven to Himself; that men may know to whom they are to be thankful for their time, for all their days, for all they enjoy. And as, under the Law, a man had no right to eat the fruits of his labours, until he had offered the first-fruits to God, and acknowledged the Lord to be the giver of all good things, until he had praised God for His bounties in blessing the earth; no more ought any man to look upon six days as his own, until he has first acknowledged, that it is the Lord who gives us all our time, blesses all our labours, who alone can prosper our handy work.

And good men have made this observation in their own private business, that God has been favourable to them, or their ways, according to the conscientious observation of the Lord's day, or their neglect of it.

And it is worth our notice, that the greatest offenders, when they come to suffer for and are sensible of their crimes, do generally confess, that the neglect and abuse of the Lord's day was that which first led them into the greatest wickedness. And indeed, how should it be otherways, when it is plain, the further we go from God, the greater power the devil gets over us, and the nearer we are to our ruin?

And every person, who has carelessly spent this day, ought to fear, that without repentance some ill may befall him or his affairs the following week.

On the other side, whoever, to the best of his abilities, shall spend the Lord's day in the service of God, and in taking care of his soul, may confidently hope, that things will go better with him for so doing; that the favour of God will attend his honest labours, and be with him, through the following week.

In the second place, we shall find, that the public welfare of the Church and state will prosper the better, when this command is conscientiously observed. For to shew that an especial providence watches over the land, when its inhabitants, trusting in God, serve Him after His own way, we have this memorable instance written for our example: the whole nation of the Jews were obliged to go three times a year to

[Exod. 34. 23, 24.]

Jerusalem, there to worship God. God, who foresaw that worldly-minded men would say in their hearts, that their enemies might come and seize upon their houses and goods in their absence, assures them, that their enemies should not assault them at such times; which promise was made good to them, even to a miracle.

But thirdly, this day was chiefly commanded for the good of our souls.

If you are sensible of your wants, this is the proper time to lay them before the throne of grace; for on this day we meet a number of necessitous creatures like ourselves, wanting instruction, grace, and strength. If we humbly join with these, and ask in faith, we are sure to be heard, and our petitions will be granted. For this is God's own day, and He makes it honourable by the greater measure of blessings which He bestows upon it.

Have we received any mercy from God (and do not we live by His mercies)? why, this is the proper time to give HIM thanks, to whom we owe all we have and enjoy.

In a word; this is God's day, of giving pardon to sinners, of giving grace to the humble, of giving comfort to the afflicted, of giving strength to the weak, of giving blessings to all that call upon Him.

What then have they to answer for who make it a day of idleness, a day of drunkenness, a day of doing odd business, of making unnecessary visits, or loitering about, as if it were a curse imposed upon them, to be kept one day in seven from their worldly labour!

But if any person is so much unacquainted with the power and goodness of God, as to think he loses time by serving God, let him but read the xvith chapter of Exodus, where he shall find Almighty God dealing with men (like ourselves), who were with very great difficulty brought to trust in God. To convince them of their ignorance, God was pleased to send them, on the evening of the sabbath, twice as much manna as He sent them on other days; both to lead them into an entire dependance upon Him, and to be an everlasting instance of His care to those that serve Him; and that the time, and the days, which men spend in honouring their Creator, are not lost, whatever worldly men may think.

SERM. LVIII.

I know not what I can add more, to lead you into a due regard for this good day, unless I just mention the ill consequences of not observing it according to the command.

Need I tell you, that one of the greatest occasions of that ignorance, which we meet with among Christians, is the neglect of the Lord's day; insomuch that there are too many who know little or nothing of God, of themselves, or of the world to come?

People may have very slow understandings; they may have little time to think of another world; but still they may, nay they would, know what is absolutely necessary to be known, if they did but constantly keep to Church on the Lord's day. They would learn to know, that we worship God because we cannot be happy without His blessing; they would learn to know, to whom they ought to be thankful for what they enjoy, because they see people meet at Church to give Him public thanks for His mercies. Lastly, they would come to understand what a dangerous thing it is to be a sinner, and at enmity with God, since they see people do not scruple to confess their faults, and to ask pardon for them, even before all men.

In short, if the Lord's day ever comes to be more neglected than it is (which God in His providence prevent), Christians will grow more ignorant, more careless of themselves, and more wicked than they are at present; and then we may justly expect, that God's judgments will be multiplied, and will be more severe amongst us.

And now, if, by what I have said, I have persuaded you to have reverend thoughts of this good day; if I have raised in your souls a desire and a resolution of keeping it holy; let me further instruct you, in a few words, how to do it worthily.

Remember then, to "keep holy the sabbath-day;" first, *by laying aside all worldly business.* That must not be the employment either of your hands or your hearts. The Lord's day has its proper work, which will take up our time, if we [Is. 58. 13.] resolve to mind it. And therefore, when the prophet requires the observation of the sabbath as a means of preserving the house of Israel, he directs them not to do their *own* work: a work there is to be done, but it is not to be our's,

but the service of God. Only thus far it is *our work*, that it is for our good; and if it is called *the Lord's service, and serving the Lord*, it is because God is graciously pleased it should be called so, that *He may reward* our service as done to Him.

Indeed, the Gospel has freed us from that superstitious observation of this day which the Jews had run into; for works of necessity and charity are to be done on *all* days, because "mercy is better than sacrifice;" that is, *acts of mercy are the best ways of serving God.* But then we must be careful not to call that necessary which is not so; which is the extreme we are run into. [Hos. 6. 6; Matt. 9. 13.]

If *servants* are freed on this day from bodily labour, and worldly business, it is that they may know they have a master in heaven: a master far greater than any master on earth, whom they are to serve, to honour, and to pray to; and not that they may be let loose to idleness, and to serve the devil, as the manner of too many is.

In short, all that own God for their Creator and preserver, all that own Jesus for their Redeemer, all that expect the assistance of God's good Spirit, to enlighten their minds with saving knowledge, to strengthen them against temptations, to comfort and deliver them in the hour of death and the day of judgment, will observe this good day religiously: that is, they will be sure to go to God's house, and confess that they altogether depend upon Him, both for this world and the next. They will acknowledge their own weakness and sinfulness, and desire His pardon; they will hear His holy Word, and beg His grace to observe it; and they will give Him thanks for the mercies they every day receive at His hands.

And because that it is greatly for God's glory that the number of His servants should increase, all good men will endeavour, as much as may be, to instruct those of their own families in the ways of righteousness; or at least take care that they go where they may be instructed.

To this end, they will breed up their children in a sense of the blessing and sacredness of days of public worship; considering that all people are just what they are bred; for they that are kept strictly to Church will be uneasy not to be

SERM. LVIII.

there; while they that are bred in a profane neglect of holy days never care for the return of such days.

But then, let us have an especial care, that custom does not bring us to observe this good day only by outward and bodily attendance and service. *This people draw nigh to Me with their lips, but their hearts are far from Me,* was God's complaint against the Jews; and so it will be with us, if we are not careful of our hearts, and do not endeavour to keep them near to God, by considering that He knows the very secrets of our hearts.

[Is. 29. 13; Matt. 15. 8.]

And indeed, if people did but set their hearts to serve the Lord, the business of the Lord's day would be a delight, and not a burden.

The works of the *creation* may, in some good measure, be seen and thought on with pleasure, even by the meanest person; and the blessing of a *redemption* is what all are concerned in, and all may know, who do but know that they are sinful helpless creatures. And these are the two proper subjects for our thoughts on these days; and which none are excused from, either on account of business, or for want of knowledge.

And God grant that we may ever esteem it a privilege and a happiness to have a day set apart for His service. May we call it a delight, and truly make it so, that we may at last come to the rest that remaineth for the people of God, through Christ our Lord. To Whom, &c.

SERMON LIX.

THE SIN AND DANGER OF SHUTTING OUR EYES AGAINST THE LIGHT OF THE GOSPEL.

JOHN iii. 19—21.

And this is the condemnation, that light is come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil. For every one that doeth evil hateth the light, neither cometh to the light, lest his deeds should be reproved. But he that doeth truth cometh to the light, that his deeds may be made manifest, that they are wrought in God.

See Ps. 95. 8; Matt. 5. 14; John 12. 35, 46; Eph. 5. 8, 13; 2 Thess. 2. 11.

I WILL first explain to you the meaning of these words; and then you will see better how much they concern every one of us. "This is the condemnation, that light is come into the world; and men love darkness rather than light, because their deeds are evil;" that is, since God has made known His will and purpose to mankind, after so plain and kind a manner, by sending His own Son to teach us how to live so as to please God, and how to escape the dreadful reward of sin in the next world; if after this we despise so great a mercy, and resolve to shut our eyes against that light which would shew us the danger we are in, while we continue ignorant of these things; and this purely because we love our sins, and will not forsake them, let what will come of it; why then we are to expect no mercy from God, but the severest sentence of condemnation.

And every body may know very easily, whether this be their case. For, saith our Lord, "Every one that doeth evil hateth the light, neither cometh to the light, lest his deeds should be reproved;" that is, every man may depend upon it, that he is in the way to ruin, who will not take fair warning when it is given him; who chooses to be ignorant of

SERM. LIX.

what may come hereafter, lest, being convinced of his folly and danger, he should be forced to reform his life and manners.

On the other hand, our Lord has given men of honest minds a proof that they are in the way of life. "He that doeth the truth cometh to the light, that his deeds may be made manifest, that they are wrought in God;" that is, in the fear of God, and according to His will, and the direction of His good Spirit; which words import thus much: they that live uprightly, and desire to please God, are pleased with that light which will shew them their duty; which will convince them of any error they are in; which will discover to them the dangers they are subject to; and which will give them the satisfaction of knowing for certain, that the way they are in is according to God's will, which therefore will in the end bring them to heaven.

This is the plain meaning of these words of our Lord Christ; and I doubt not but that they are very easily understood. The only difficulty will be, to prevail with ourselves to see how far any of us are concerned in them; that we may be afraid of that dreadful sentence of condemnation which will be passed upon every soul of man, who shall despise and hate that light which God in mercy vouchsafes him, to direct him in the way to heaven and happiness. "This is the condemnation, that light is come into the world, and men love darkness rather than light, because their deeds are evil."

But what is that light against which men shut their eyes, and which will therefore be their condemnation? Why, it is the light of the Gospel, communicated unto the world from God, by *His* beloved Son, and *our* Saviour Jesus Christ; by which Gospel God has made known to us what will become of us when we die; namely, "they that have done good shall go into life everlasting; and they that have done evil, into everlasting fire."

[Matt. 25. 41, 46; John 5. 29.]

Now, they that have any manner of seriousness will very naturally desire to know what it is that God expects from them; how they may attain that everlasting life and happiness which God has prepared for them that love Him, and obey His laws; as also how they may escape the wrath to come.

Why now, Jesus Christ has made all this known to us after the most gracious manner. For instance: He has made known to us, that if any man perish, it is from his own wilful obstinacy and blindness; that God desireth not the *death of a sinner*, but that he should turn from his sin and be saved; and, because all men are *born in sin and the children of wrath*, He has made known to us, how we may certainly be reconciled to God; what we are to do to please Him, after He is reconciled to us; as also what dispositions and qualifications are necessary to fit us for heaven.

And because He knows whereof we are made, and that of ourselves we are not able to understand these things so fully as we should do, much less to *do* them, He has therefore made known to us, that He will, upon certain conditions, give us His Holy Spirit, which shall enable us effectually to know our duty, and to overcome all the temptations and difficulties we can possibly meet with, whether from the *world*, the *flesh*, or the *devil*, which are our mortal enemies, and which, if not resisted, will bring us to destruction both of body and soul.

And that we may know these things the better, He has appointed a certain order of men, who, at the peril of their own souls, shall ever and anon be sounding these things in your ears; shall instruct the ignorant, and reduce them that are out of the way, either by reproof or by godly discipline.

And because men are but too apt to think all that time lost which is not spent on their worldly business, He has appointed one day in seven, which shall be employed chiefly in learning their duty, in praising their Creator, and praying for such things as are *requisite and necessary as well for their bodies as for their souls*. And they that employ this time after this manner, are sure to be no losers by so doing.

This is the *light* and *knowledge* which God has given us. And one would be apt to think, that every soul, who hears of these things, should be much concerned about them, and should argue *thus*, or after some such manner, with himself:

If these things are true, it concerns me very much to lay them seriously to heart: for if this is the time in which to provide for eternity; if death is ever at hand, and the consequences of a surprise most dreadful; if I am to be for ever happy, or for ever miserable, as I lead my life, and as I end

SERM. LIX.

my days here; if God, *who* only can tell us what will become of us when we die, has expressly declared, that He will call every soul to an account for the works done in the body, whether they have been good or evil; that this judgment, and the sentence following, cannot be very far off: for (as our Saviour intimates), as the soul of the rich unmerciful man, immediately after death, went to a place of torment, so the soul of Lazarus was, as soon as ever he was dead, carried by the angels into Paradise, a place of rest and comfort, there to remain until the judgment of the great day; and that thus it must be with every soul when death parts it from the body; why then, it very much concerns me (let other people be never so careless), to lay these things to heart; to provide against the worst that can happen: to be very earnest to know what I must do to appease and to please God; what I must do to escape that place of torment which the rich man so dolefully complained of; and how I may be made partaker of that happiness in Paradise which the soul of Lazarus enjoys till the resurrection, when his soul and body shall enjoy eternal happiness.

[Luke 16. 22, &c.]

This is what one would be apt to think every Christian, who has heard of these things and pretends to believe them to be true, should reason with himself. But, God knows, this is not the way that the generality of people, the generality of Christians, take; for, instead of being awakened into a sober fear for themselves; instead of asking that concerning question, *Lord! what must I do to be saved?* that is, how must I live so as to make my life easy and my death happy? instead of this, they take the sure way to be for ever undone. They *hate*, and they *avoid, that light* which would shew them their mistake and their danger. "They say unto God" (as those heretofore did), "depart from us, for we desire not the knowledge of Thy ways;" or, as those which Isaiah complains of, "who say to the seers, see not; and to the prophets, prophesy not unto us right things; speak unto us smooth things; cause the Holy One of Israel to cease from before us;" that is, do not speak to us of God and His Word; we had rather not hear these things; they make us uneasy; while we do not know them, we do not fear them; and while we do not fear them, we are easy; we see plainly, that if we

Job 21. 14.

chap. 30. 10, 11.

give way to the belief of these things, we must lead another sort of life; we must part, every man, with his most beloved sins, which we *cannot* yet think of doing; we will therefore choose to continue in darkness; we had rather continue ignorant, and enjoy the pleasures we do, than part with them, or be tormented with the knowledge of what will follow, if we do not part with them.

I know very well, what every one that hears me, and understands, and minds what I have said, thinks of this way of reasoning.

What! people that are bred and born amongst Christians; people that every day profess to believe a judgment and life to come, rewards and punishments of another world; is it possible for Christians to speak, or to think at this wild rate? People who have the light of the Gospel to guide them, and the ministers of the Gospel to instruct them, can *they* be said to be still in darkness? Can they be said to hate *that light* which God has sent *to guide their feet into the way of peace?*

Why now, Christians, I will set before you matter of fact; and you will see that it is as true at this day, as it was when our Saviour spoke these words; and that, although *light*, the light of the Gospel, *has been so long in the world*, "yet men" (the generality of men) "love darkness rather than light:" and, for the very same reason, even "because their deeds are evil," they will not bear to be reproved; they will not bear to be disturbed; they will not lay these things to heart.

And *first;* as our blessed Lord observed then, that "the Scribes and the Pharisees rejected the counsel of God,"— His gracious designs of mercy to bring them to Christ by the baptism of John; even so it is now. Infinite is the number of those, who, though the glad tidings of the Gospel are held forth to them, will not vouchsafe to hearken to them, because they are too wise to be taught by God Himself. [Luke 7. 30.]

But, *secondly*, this is not the worst of our case. There are many, very many, who set themselves to oppose this light with all their might; who deny the Lord that bought them; deny, or, which is worse, despise all His gracious offers of *pardon*, of *reconciliation*, of *assistance*, and of *happiness*. [2 Pet. 2. 1; Jude 4.]

Thirdly, there are others, and perhaps they are most in number, who dare not go so far as to deny the Lord Jesus,

SERM. LIX.

and the Gospel He has given us, who yet *do hold the truth in unrighteousness,* do lead as careless and ungodly lives, as the greatest infidels. [Rom. 1. 18.]

Lastly, there are but too many, and in the very throng of Christians, who are utter strangers to the very design of Christianity; who know not why they are baptized; why they were obliged to renounce the devil, to believe in God, and to serve Him; who are altogether unconcerned how to please God while they live, and know not what will become of them when they die.

All this is matter of fact. It is an astonishing infatuation that men should not *care* for, should *avoid,* should *hate,* that light which would shew them their folly and their danger. But so it is; and our Lord has given us the true reason: "Every one that doeth evil hateth the light, neither cometh to the light, lest his deeds should be reproved;" that is, lest he should see his error, be convinced of his danger, and be obliged to part with his beloved sins. And this is the true reason, let whatever else be pretended, of all that *infidelity, ignorance of Divine things, profaneness,* and *stupid carelessness,* which we meet with, which way soever we turn us.

Some therefore choose to be infidels, concluding, one may suppose, that if they do not believe the terrors of the world to come, they have no reason to fear them; that, therefore, they may go on in the ways of their own choosing without disturbance.

To such perverse reasoning, one would oppose what St. Paul saith to Timothy: "If ye believe not, yet God abideth faithful; He cannot deny Himself:" that is, if God has decreed "that every one that believeth not, shall be damned," this will be so in the conclusion, though all the world should agree *not to believe one word of it.* 2 Tim. 2. 13.

Others there are, who believe, who see the light, but hate the sight of it, because it shews them their error and their danger. The consequence of which will certainly be what St. Paul has set down; "Whereas they did not like to retain God in their knowledge, God gave them over to a reprobate mind:" enough, one would think, to startle the most resolved sinner,—to be abandoned of God and left to himself! Rom. 1. 28.

Nor are they in a much better condition, who hope, that

their being in darkness, their want of knowledge, will excuse their following their own ways, and living in sin. Want of knowledge, in a Christian country! where the church doors are open one day in seven; where the Gospel is, or may be, in every body's hands; where the great truths and duties of religion are made plain to the meanest capacities, and fitted for the shortest memories!

In short, *none are so blind as they that will not see.* And this is, in truth, the case of all such as are engaged in sinful courses or infidelity. They shut their eyes and complain that they want light: and at the same time they are "as those that rebel against the light," of whom Job speaks, "the morning being to them as the shadow of death." And therefore, *they hate Jesus Christ, because He hath brought life and immortality to light through the Gospel.* They hate that Gospel, because it holds forth a standing light which shews them to themselves; they hate Christ's ministers, because they are, or should be, ever sounding these, and such like truths in their ears: "Without holiness no man shall see the Lord:" "Neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor thieves, nor drunkards, nor covetous, &c., shall enter into the kingdom of heaven."

Job 24. 13, 17.

[2 Tim. 1. 10.]

It is for this reason, that, as the prophet Amos, chap. v. 10, speaks, "They hate him that rebuketh in the gate;" that is, the conscientious civil magistrate, who punishes vice: "and they abhor him that speaketh uprightly;" that is, the priest, who tells them the plain truth.

In one word; they that are engaged in wickedness of any kind will have an aversion to every thing that belongs to God; His *house*, His *day*, His *word*, His *ministers*, and His *ordinances;* and by this they themselves may know that they are in darkness, and in the way of perdition.

Now, the things which I would recommend to your consideration, from these words of Christ, are these following:

And *first;* it is plain from hence, *that if men have no religion, it is because they will have none.* It is not for want of light to shew them the way they should go; but because they are resolved not to part with their sins, they avoid that light which would shew them their folly and their danger. And let such people complain never so much, that they want

SERM. LIX.

to be convinced of the truths of Christianity, and of that holiness which it requires, and the happiness which it proposes; they will still continue in darkness, and will die without faith, and without hopes of mercy; for *faith being the gift of God,* He expects, that they that want it should ask it, and after such a manner as to shew they value it; that they should prepare themselves for receiving it, by parting with those sins which they know to be displeasing to God, from whom they ask this favour. When they do this, they will believe the Gospel, and be convinced, how much it concerns them to obey its laws: but whoever is afraid of seeing the truth, has no reason to expect that God will shew it him.

Secondly; as for such as *do* believe the Gospel, *but hold the truth in unrighteousness;* that is, who believe as they should do, but lead careless or ungodly lives, such would do well to consider, that every man who lives in any known sin is advancing towards atheism; that is, to a state which will oblige him, first to *wish,* and then to *say there is no God.*

Christians will not believe this, or that God will ever deprive them of that measure of light and knowledge which He has vouchsafed them; and yet it is as certain as any truth in the Gospel, that he who lives not up to that measure of grace which God has given him, even *that which he hath shall be taken away. If men will not retain God in their knowledge,* and live like men that know God, *God will give them up to a reprobate mind;* that is, to a mind void of judgment; so that they shall commit all iniquity with greediness, as a most righteous punishment for making so ill use of the grace of God, and the light He had given them.

In the next place; they that hope to make their lives easy, by continuing in darkness, and by shutting their eyes against the light, do not consider, that that very darkness will make them uneasy. No man ever found perfect satisfaction either in ignorance or infidelity. *Doubts* and *fears* of what may come hereafter, are the certain consequence of sin, of ignorance, and of unbelief.

Fourthly; they that are uneasy or unwilling to hear their duty, or to have their miscarriages reproved, may depend upon it, that they are in a bad way, a way which will lead

them to their ruin. The case being with them as it is with those that have bad eyes: the light makes them uneasy, and they choose to be in the dark, and want all that comfort and advantage, which others enjoy; and, which is worst of all, they know not what this blindness will end in.

This being the case of all such as are careless hearers of God's Word; negligent in coming to His house; despisers of His ministers, and treating them as their enemies; uneasy at the reproof of their friends; angry with those that shew them their faults; never pray for God's grace and Spirit to enlighten their minds with saving truth; stifle the voice of their own consciences, and the remains of that light which God has given them in earnest of a better, if they would make use of that; all these love darkness better than the light, and are liable to that sentence of condemnation, which will send them to remediless ruin and misery.

But then, in the next place, is it not a strange blindness that has seized the hearts of Christians, who pretend to pity those poor heathens that want the light of the Gospel, and yet make so little use of it themselves? How glad would a serious heathen be to know, how he might be freed from the guilt of the sins he has committed; how he may overcome that corruption of his nature which leads him to sin continually! How thankful would he be to be certainly informed of what becomes of men when they die: whether they shall be accountable for what they have done here? Whether there be rewards and punishments in another life, and how these may be escaped, and those attained?

Why now, good Christians, every one of you do, or may, know these things, and be as well assured of them, as that you live; and yet, how few value the blessing of knowing them, and still fewer that make any use of this knowledge! Can there be any blindness equal to this? You thank God you are a Christian, and that you believe the Gospel: What! and yet live as if every word of it were false!

People do not consider, that to *believe the Gospel*, is to be convinced of the certainty of the rewards and punishments of the life to come, of the absolute necessity of *holiness*, in order to escape eternal misery, and to attain eternal happiness; it is to be convinced, that nothing in this world ought to tempt

SERM. LIX.

us to displease God, by breaking any one of His commands; for what can a man choose in exchange for his soul?

It is to be convinced, that we are in real danger; and that we ought to be always on our guard; for, that we have many enemies to deal with; a powerful evil spirit, a bewitching world, and a corrupt heart.

It is to be convinced of the necessity of making use of all those means of salvation which are prescribed in the Gospel; such are, reading or hearing the Word of God with concern; praying to God continually for light to know, and power to do what will please Him.

Say you are convinced of these things, and are resolved by God's help, to live as if you did in truth believe them; and then you will have reason to thank God that you are a Christian, *and to praise Him who has called you out of darkness unto His marvellous light.*

But alas! the lives men generally lead will not suffer us to believe, that they are thus convinced of the truths of the Gospel; this gives all serious Christians both shame and grief.—But to proceed.

Sixthly; these words of our Lord afford matter of direction and comfort to all such who love and fear God, and desire to do such things as may please Him. For finding themselves always willing to *hear*, and to *learn*, and to *know* His will and pleasure, they conclude with good reason, and with satisfaction, that their lives are such as they should be, because they will abide to be examined by the light.

But then, even these should consider, that there is still a danger of miscarrying, of quenching that light which God has given them, and of returning into a state of darkness; of becoming again slaves to those lusts which darken the soul, grieve the Holy Spirit of God, and lead to outer darkness, where there is nothing but weeping and gnashing of teeth.

Lastly; let us all, that have any concern for eternity, take
Jer. 13. 16. the direction of the prophet; "To give glory to the Lord our God," by living as becomes His servants, "before He cause darkness, and before our feet stumble upon the dark mountains; and while we look for light, He turn it into the shadow of death," *before the night cometh, when no man can work.*

Eternity is a matter of too great concern to be neglected, or put off to the last.

To be for ever happy, or for ever miserable, will be the certain portion of every man, who has made use of, or turned his back upon, that light which God has afforded him to bring him to everlasting life.

God grant that we may all think of this, that we may walk as children of the light; and that the prince and powers of darkness may have no share in us; but that we may attain the light of everlasting life. Amen.

SERMON LX.

ASH-WEDNESDAY.

THE GREAT INDIGNATION OF GOD AGAINST SINNERS.

DEUT. xxix. 18—20.

Josh. 8. 33; Ps. 119. 21; Prov. 1. 24; Rom. 2. 8; 3. 20; 5. 20; 7. 13; Gal. 3. 13.

Lest there should be among you man or woman, or family or tribe, whose heart turneth away this day from the Lord our God, to go and serve the gods of these nations: lest there should be among you a root that beareth gall and wormwood; and it come to pass, when he heareth the words of this curse, that he bless himself in his heart, saying, I shall have peace, though I walk in the imagination of mine heart to add drunkenness to thirst. The Lord will not spare him, but then the anger of the Lord and His jealousy shall smoke against that man, and all the curses that are written in this book shall lie upon him, and the Lord shall blot out his name from under heaven.

HERE is one of the most solemn and dreadful declarations of God's displeasure, that, perhaps, is to be met with in the whole Book of God. Let us consider the *occasion:*

In the chapter going before, Moses had very particularly set before the people of Israel *the blessings of obedience to the laws of God*, and *the curses which would certainly follow their disobedience.* And that they might be more careful, and afraid of drawing down those curses upon their heads, the Levites were commanded, in the audience of all the people, [chap. 27. 14, &c.] "to say, with a loud voice, Cursed be the man that is guilty of idolatry; of undutifulness to his parents; of removing his neighbour's land-mark; of making the blind to go out of his way; that perverteth the judgment of the stranger, the fatherless, and the widow, &c. And all the people shall say *Amen;*" acknowledging the righteousness of the laws of

God, and confessing that a curse is due to those that wilfully break them.

And all this was done to the intent, that, being admonished of the great indignation of God against sinners, they might flee from such vices, for which they did, with their own mouths, affirm *the curse of God to be due.*

But lest, after this solemn declaration, there should be any so perverse as to slight these curses, and hope to escape the judgments of God, though they do the things here forbidden; therefore Almighty God does, in the words of the text, most solemnly declare, "That if any man, when he heareth the words of this curse, shall bless himself in his heart, saying, I shall have peace," that is, no evil shall befall me, "though I walk in the imagination" or stubbornness "of mine heart, and add one sin to another: the Lord will not spare such a man, but His anger and His jealousy shall smoke against that man, and all the curses that are written in this book shall lie upon him, and the Lord shall blot out his name from under heaven."

So that the persons who are here so severely threatened are such as hear the things which God has forbidden upon pain of His displeasure, and instead of saying *Amen* to His righteous sentence (that is, acknowledging that they who do such things are worthy of death), not only do the same, but flatter themselves in their wickedness, and fear not the judgments of God, and so become incurably wicked. For if the *wrath* and *fear* of Almighty God will not restrain men, no other consideration can keep them from destruction.

Thus you see how mercifully God provided for His own people, to keep them in awe; to keep His laws fresh in their memories; to plant His fear in their hearts. They were bound to hear the curses due to those that should offend; they were obliged to give their assent to every part of the law, *that it was holy, just, and good;* and that the transgressors of it deserved the wrath of God; and they are most solemnly assured, that such as should refuse to give *this testimony* to the truth of God, and the righteousness of His laws, by saying *Amen* to them, that man should be exposed to the vengeance of an angry God.

SERM. LX.

But this *command* and *service*, you will say, was given to the Jews, who were under the Law; and what is this to us? Why, I will tell you: we have the *same principles*, the *same seeds of disobedience* in our nature, and we are as liable and as apt to forget our duty and our God as *ever the Jews were;* and we are as sure to be punished, if we offend presumptuously, as ever they were; and consequently, we have as much need to have the curses of God against notorious sinners set before us as ever the Jews had.

Having said thus much to shew *why our Church retains this service,* I now proceed to the words of the text, which naturally offer these following observations:

First; That men are but too apt to turn away from God, *to set up idols in their hearts,* to speak peace unto and govern themselves, not according to *God's laws,* but according to their *own imaginations.*

Secondly; That therefore God has, from the beginning, published all His laws with a *curse* or *penalty* upon offenders, that they may be *afraid* of bringing destruction upon themselves.

Thirdly; That such as do turn their ears from hearing the law, and its curses, do reject the counsel of God, provoke Him to wrath, and take the sure way to ruin.

I. And first; *Men are very apt to turn away from God, to set up their own imaginations to govern and judge themselves by; and so speak peace to themselves without either reason or Scripture.*

And indeed, thus it has been with men ever since our *first parents,* who, forsaking the commands of God, would needs be *wiser than their Maker;* and by their *infidelity* and *disobedience* lost that happiness which their posterity have ever since been striving to regain; and generally without success, because they hope for happiness by ways of their own devising. *For it is utterly impossible that a man in a state of corruption should recover himself, who, in a state of innocence, could not preserve himself from falling.* And though God in mercy has contrived a way for our redemption from this miserable bondage, and would most assuredly bring us back to Himself, would we be but governed by Him; yet, such is our perverseness, we think *His ways are grievous,*

and try a thousand ways of going to heaven, without being obliged to part with our beloved sins.

For instance: There are an infinite number of people, who have very little sense of religion, who were never awakened with the guilt of their sins, or the wrath of an angry God; who have no token of their *obedience* or *repentance* to shew, and yet *hope* to be happy; and *that* is all they have for it. Gracious God! that creatures liable to eternal misery should not be more concerned to know how to avoid it!

Another delusion is, *that* of *those* who fancy that God will not be so severe as He has threatened; not considering what the Apostle saith to such foolish imaginations: "If we be- 2 Tim. 2. 13.
lieve not, yet He abideth faithful, He cannot deny Himself;" that is, let men believe what they please, and depend upon their own fancies, God will judge them according to His word; and those that have done wickedly, and have not repented, shall have eternal torments for their portion, *whether they believe this or not.*

There are likewise people who imagine, that, because they do not pretend to be very strict in their lives, therefore they are not bound to be so. A clergyman, who teacheth others, they think, should be very careful to keep God's commands; but for other people, they hope an allowance will be made, and so an allowance they take; never laying *this truth* to heart, that "without holiness, no man" *whatever* "shall see [Heb. 12. 14.]
the Lord." And indeed, it is not because a clergyman teacheth others, that he is bound to be *sober,* and *chaste,* and *just,* and *charitable;* but it is because neither he, nor any body else, *can* go to heaven without these qualifications.

Again: Some people hope, because they are not so wicked as others, that therefore they are in no danger. They do not enquire whether they are such as God commands them to be; but only whether they are not as bad as it is possible for them to be.

There are also many who will tell you, that however wicked they have been, they are not so now. Such people would do well to consider, that he who was once a *murderer,* or an *adulterer,* will always be such; and that no *murderer,* or

SERM. LX.

adulterer, can enter into the kingdom of heaven, but by *faith* and *repentance,* which require something more than barely forsaking of sin.

It is likewise but too plain, that many people, if they can but hide their crimes from men, are no farther concerned. They are not willing to remember, that God undoubtedly sees their ways, and knows the very secrets of their hearts; that He is one day to be their judge; and that He "can destroy both body and soul in hell."

[Matt. 10. 28.]

Farther: If a man has but some good qualities, he is apt to hope that this will bear him out, though he is engaged in a sinful course of life. The Spirit of God, by St. James, saith the direct contrary. But if people are resolved to follow their inclinations, they will not mind what God saith, though they are sure to be ruined.

chap. 2. 10.

Lastly; it is not possible to say how many perish by consenting to known iniquity, in hopes of having an opportunity of repenting before they die: knowing at the same time, that if they should die without repentance, they are sure to be undone for ever.

Now *these,* and such as these, are the idols in men's hearts. And they are called *idols,* because they are *vanity* and *nothing;* that is, they are not able to deliver those that put their trust in them from the wrath of God. And yet they are trusted to as if they could. And therefore God, who knows all these secret delusions of the heart, and knows also that nothing but *fear* and *dread* can keep men from taking shelter under these idols of their own making,—

II. *God,* I say, *has therefore from the beginning published all His laws with a curse or penalty upon offenders; that men may be afraid of the anger of God, and beware of provoking His jealousy, by doing the things which He has so strictly forbidden.* Which was the second particular that we proposed to consider.

One may observe a strange unwillingness in people to hear the *curses* or *penalties* of the law of God against impenitent sinners. The meaning of this is, we desire to follow our own ways without disturbance; *for the Law was given that sin might abound;* that is, that sin might appear in its true colours; and that men, seeing the *curses* due to it, might be afraid

[Rom. 5. 20.]

of coming near it; but instead of doing this, they are not willing so much as to *hear,* that a *curse* attends it.

It is true the Law is *terrible,* and the anger of God, and His curses against offenders, are indeed *dreadful;* and yet all little enough to keep those that hear them from transgressing His laws. What a world then should we have, if every one might do *what was right in his own eyes,* without fear of what will follow.

But God has consulted better for His creatures; for He has plainly given us a rule to walk by, and He has plainly told us what we must certainly expect, if we refuse to observe it. By this we come to the knowledge of ourselves, and the wretched condition we are in. In this law, as in a glass, every man may see what he is by nature, and what every man would be, did not the grace of God hinder him. For God has laid His *curse* upon all that break His laws, which all are subject to do, that all may take warning, and "flee from the wrath to come." [Luke 3. 7.] That such as are asleep in sinful pleasures, that such as are dead in trespasses and sins, may, by the sound of the vengeance of God, be awakened and raised to a life of righteousness.

But "the Law" (the Apostle tells us) "is not made for the righteous, but for the lawless and disobedient." 1 Tim. 1. 9. And who, pray, is not so by nature? *Let him that is without sin* make this objection; let him that does not find in himself the seeds of wickedness, let such a one, if he pleaseth, refuse to hear the curses of the Law.

I know people are apt to fancy, that it is impossible for *them* ever to be what they see and hear of others, *murderers, idolaters, adulterers,* and the like: but pray from what parents did these people spring? The Psalmist professeth of himself, "Behold, I was shapen in iniquity, and in sin did my mother conceive me." Ps. 51. 5. And most certainly we are all of the very same race; *a seed of evil doers,* capable of and prone to every sin, to which the law of God has joined a curse.

But as the Law shews us what we are by nature, so does it shew us what we do deserve, and what will be our portion, if we do not repent and turn to God, forsaking every evil way. "Every curse that is written in this book shall fall upon him," saith the Lord. See the effect this consideration had upon

SERM. LX.

David himself: "There is no soundness in my flesh, because of Thine anger; neither is there any rest in my bones, because of my sin: for mine iniquities are gone over mine head; as an heavy burden, they are too heavy for me." And verily, whoever has not felt some such pangs of affliction as these in his soul, has reason to fear that he is still under *the curse of the Law.*

Ps. 38. 3.

But this is not all that God designed by setting the Law and His judgments before us. "My son," saith Joshua to Achan, "give glory to God, and tell me what thou hast done." And this is another effect the fear of God will have upon true penitents. They will *give glory to God;* will acknowledge that *He* can bring to light the hidden works of darkness; that *He* can humble the proudest sinner, and soften the hardest heart; that the terror of His wrath, and heavy displeasure, are only able to awaken and convert a sinner, when all other arguments have been made use of to little purpose.

Josh. 7. 19.

Thus it was with the Psalmist, when the terrors of God had made him sensible of his miscarriage: "I acknowledge my sin unto Thee, and mine iniquity have I not hid. I said, I will confess my transgressions unto the Lord." And *thus* indeed it will be with every true penitent, who considers, that whether he *hides* or *confesseth* his sin *now,* the day will come, when the most secret sins must come to light.

Ps. 32. 5

And when he seriously considers this, the *Law of God,* and the *dread of His judgments,* will have *another blessed effect* upon him. For it will make him *loath* and *abhor* himself; and he will say, in the words of Ezra, "I am ashamed, and blush to lift up my face unto Thee, my God, for mine iniquities are increased over my head, and my trespass is grown up unto heaven." And in *this temper of soul,* we shall not need to be *advised,* or *compelled* to acts of humiliation; but we shall *fast* and *pray,* and deny ourselves the pleasures of life, as willingly as before we indulged them.

Ezra 9. 6.

And now, being thus affected, we may be truly said, in the words of St. Luke, to be "disposed for eternal life." For, "to them that thus fear God" (saith the prophet), "shall the Sun of Righteousness arise with healing in His wings." And this is the *last* and *great* end of the Law, to *bring us*

Acts 13. 48.

Mal. 4. 2.

unto Christ, who is ordained of God to be *the Saviour of the world;* that, believing in Him, we may receive *remission of sins;* which, though the Law could not give us, yet by its terrors, it forced us (through the favour of God) to look out for help to one who is "mighty to save." [Is. 63. 1.]

III. So that *such as do turn their ears from hearing the Law and its curses, do reject the counsel of God for their good, and take the sure way to ruin.* Which was the last particular we proposed to consider.

It is not for nothing that the Spirit of God has so often told us, that "the fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom." [Prov. 9. 10.] But how shall *they* fear God, who know nothing of His judgments, and who will not hear what He has determined against presumptuous sinners?

People may fancy, that good advice might do all this; that by a due execution of the laws, (and especially if the ancient Church discipline were revived,) men would be forced to fear God; that good examples would recommend piety; and that if a little more care were taken in the education of children, they would naturally fear God, and walk in His ways.

Now, it is certain, all these are excellent helps to piety; but unless the fear of God and the dread of His judgments possess the heart, these will do no more but only restrain the *outward man.* For how many are there who observe an outward decency, and yet live securely in most damnable sins! How many have had good examples, and a Christian education, and after all break loose and become profligately wicked! How many submit to public penance, without being bettered by it, or suffering it to touch their hearts! How long may one talk to a carnal man of the inconveniencies of living in sin, of the prejudice he does his *health,* his *reputation,* his *estate,* and his *family!* How much for his *advantage* it would be, and *praise-worthy,* to live like a Christian! And all this without any other effect than making him live more cautiously for the time to come.

Alas! these are all but weak arguments to *awaken* a man that is in a sleep of deep security; to raise one *from the death of sin unto the life of righteousness.* No less a voice than that which spoke in thunder from Mount Sinai, can possibly startle a soul accustomed to and in love with wickedness.

SERM. LX.

But perhaps you will think the Gospel is a milder dispensation, and that it has no need of these terrors to persuade and convert its hearers: but you will find the quite contrary when you consult it seriously. "Go, ye cursed, into everlasting fire, prepared for the devil and his angels; where there is weeping, and wailing, and gnashing of teeth; where the worm dieth not, and the fire is not quenched." These are the words of the merciful Saviour of the world.

[Matt. 25. 41; 24. 51; Mark 9. 44.]

And if the mild, the compassionate Jesus was forced to use such language to oblige His followers "to work out their salvation with fear and trembling," we may be very sure no milder arguments will serve to awaken and convert men; and that such as despise these arguments are incurable by any other method.

[Phil. 2. 12.]

Whoever, therefore, has any concern for his soul, and is not already converted, would do well to think of these things; and that he may consider them to better purpose, I would recommend these few points to his most *serious thoughts:*

First; That it is to no purpose to complain of the corruption of our nature, of the multitude of evil examples, of the power of temptations, and the difficulties of a Christian life; and, at the same time, to shun that very way which God has directed us to take in order to overcome all these difficulties; which, as you have heard, nothing but the fear of God and His grace can do, which is bestowed on *them only* that fear Him. If therefore you are in good earnest, and would get out of the *snare of the devil,* hear what the Law saith to those that break it; hearken to the curses it pronounces against presumptuous sinners; *own the justice of them;* pray God to set these things home upon your heart; and, depend upon it, the fear of God can enable you to overcome all the difficulties you complain of, or can meet with.

Secondly; Let us always remember, that the curse will come, whether we say *Amen* or not; and that *fornicators,* and *adulterers,* and *drunkards,* and *thieves,* with all others who presumptuously break the laws of God, will be shut out of the kingdom of heaven, whether they will hear, or whether they will forbear to hear.

In the *third* place; let none think themselves so far advanced as not to need the terrors of the Law to keep them

awake, for self-confidence and security have undone very many; and, generally speaking, those that *fear least*, have *most reason* to *fear*. And even the best of Christians will find *this advantage* in hearing the Law, and the curses due to the transgressors of it; they will be humbled with the remembrance of their past offences; they will be more thankful for their deliverance from the curse of the Law; and more affectionately adore the Lord that redeemed them from so great a death. And such have a particular promise of the favour of God:—"To this man will I look," saith the Lord, "even to him that is poor and of a contrite heart, and that trembleth at My word;" that is, who feareth *Him*, and trembleth at *His* word, "who is able to destroy both body and soul in hell." [Isa. 66. 2.] [Matt. 10. 28.]

What remains then, but that, "*knowing* the terror of the Lord," every one of us in particular seriously consider, wherein we have broken any of those laws which the Spirit of God assures us will keep us out of heaven; that we take the Apostle's advice, and "judge ourselves, that we may not be judged" and punished "by God;" which is the only way to escape, when once we have transgressed His laws. [2 Cor. 5. 11.] [1 Cor. 11. 31.]

And for such as have not yet fallen into any of those sins against which the curse of God is threatened, let them bless God, by whose grace they have been prevented; let them see their own frailty in the fall of others; and, setting before their eyes the curse they are liable to, if they ever be so unhappy as to deserve it by their sins, let them "watch and pray, that they enter not into temptation;" remembering the words of Solomon, "Happy is the man that feareth always;" as also those of the Apostle "Let him that thinketh he standeth, take heed lest he fall." [Matt. 26. 41.] [Prov. 28. 14.] [1 Cor. 10. 12.]

And does not the Church offer us all, at this time, a RARE OPPORTUNITY of improving these considerations? Does she not set before us the curses of God against impenitent sinners? Does she not require us to hear them, and to acknowledge with our own mouths, "that they which do such things are worthy of death?" for that is the meaning of saying *Amen* to them. Does she not by this service PUT US IN REMEMBRANCE WHEREIN WE HAVE OFFENDED? Does she not by the same service give us fair warning, WHAT WILL FOLLOW, [Rom. 1. 32.]

SERM. LX.

if we rebel against God? And can any man, who desires or who pretends to fear God, turn his back on God's own institution? We do therefore testify against all such, that they neither FEAR GOD nor sincerely desire to KEEP HIS COMMANDMENTS.

[Eccles. 12. 13.]

Let us earnestly pray that this fear may constantly rule in our hearts, and that we may lead a life agreeable to the commandments of God; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

SERMON LXI.

OF CHRIST'S SECOND COMING TO JUDGE THE WORLD.

REV. xxii. 12.

And behold, I come quickly; and My reward is with Me, to give to every man according as his work shall be.

See Matt. 16. 27; John 5. 22, 23; Acts 10. 42; 17. 31; 2 Cor. 5. 10.

WE BELIEVE THAT THOU SHALT COME TO BE OUR JUDGE. This is what we say every day with our lips; but, *O Jesu!* how little do we lay to heart what this means! And yet there is no doctrine in holy Scripture more *clear*, none more *certain*, none more *awakening*. If there will be a *day of judgment*, there will be a *sentence;* if a *sentence*, that sentence must be righteous and just; if a righteous sentence is to pass upon every man, and upon every work of man; if "God will then bring every work into judgment, and every secret thing, whether it be good, or whether it be evil;" if He will then "give to every man according to his ways, and according to the fruits of his doings;" if He will *then* say to the *righteous*, "Come ye blessed of My Father, ye shall go into life eternal:" and to the *wicked*, "ye shall go into everlasting punishment;" (all which God has expressly declared *shall* come to pass;) it very much concerns Christians to consider seriously, how it is like to go with them at *that great day*.

Eccles. 12. 14.

Jer. 32. 19.

[Matt. 25. 34, 41.]

And yet such is our unthoughtfulness, we live as if not one word of this were true, as if it would never come to pass. But as sure as Jesus Christ once came to forewarn us of these things, so sure will He come again to call all men to an account, how they have lived under the light of His Gospel, and what use they have made of His favours.

Our Lord's first *Advent*, that is, *His coming in the flesh*, (for that is the meaning of the word *Advent*,) His *first coming*

SERM. LXI.

was, to recover mankind out of the snare of the devil; to restore them to the favour of God, which they had lost; to put them into a condition of attaining eternal happiness; to give them such laws and rules as should certainly bring them to heaven if they would be governed by them. "I came not," saith He, "to condemn the world, but to save the world."

[John 3. 17; 12. 47.]

But His *second coming* will be, to take an account how men have improved under these advantages, and accordingly to pass *judgment upon them.* This He has given us to understand, by the similitude of a man travelling into a far country, who, calling his servants, gave every one talents according to their abilities, and at his return called them all to an account. Such as had been careful and diligent according to their power, he rewarded much above what they deserved or expected, and such as had either despised his authority or had been careless of their duty, he punished most severely.

Matt. 25.

From which it appears, that at present we are in a *state of trial;* that we may be for ever happy, if it is not our own fault; and that we *shall* be for ever miserable, if we neglect this *day of grace;* for when the time of trial, which God shall have made of all men, is over, then cometh the *judgment;* by which judgment our Lord Christ assures us, "the wicked shall go into everlasting punishment; but the righteous into life eternal."

Matt.25.46.

So that if *any thing,* either the fear of hell-torments, or the hopes of heaven and happiness, will make people serious and concerned for their souls' eternal welfare, there can be no subject more proper to awaken us, than this of Christ's *second coming* mentioned in the text: "Behold, I come quickly; and My reward is with Me, to give to every man according as his works shall be;" that is, as St. Paul expresseth it, "To them, who by patient continuance in well-doing, seek for glory, and honour, and immortality, eternal life; but unto them that do not obey the truth, but obey unrighteousness, indignation and wrath, tribulation and anguish, upon every soul of man that doeth evil; but glory, honour, and peace, to every man that worketh good."

Rom. 2. 7.

So that you see, Christians, here is a subject of the greatest *terror,* and the *greatest comfort; terror* to such as live in sin,

and know not how soon death and judgment may overtake them; but *comfort* to all such as are working out their salvation with *fear* and *trembling;* that is, with a concern suitable to the value of their souls, and the account they are to give.

I hope you do not expect I should go about to prove these things; *that there will be a day of judgment;* and that good men will then be made happy, and wicked men miserable: it is enough, sure, if I shew you, that the SON OF GOD HIMSELF has declared this, in words as plain as can be expressed: "Behold," saith He, "I come quickly; and My reward is with Me, to give to every man according as his work shall be."

And in the twenty-fifth chapter of St. Matthew, He Himself tells us plainly how He will proceed in that great day; that before Him shall be gathered all nations, and He shall separate them one from another, as a shepherd separateth his sheep from the goats; and that having convinced the one of their good deeds, and the other of their evil deeds, "they that have done good shall go into life everlasting; and they that have done evil into everlasting fire." So that thus it *must* be, God having declared it, whether people think of it or not, and though too many never lay these things to heart.

But you will wonder, perhaps, that of so many Christians who profess to believe a *judgment and life to come,* so few are seriously concerned to provide against that great day. I will shew you the reason, and you will be satisfied it is the true reason.

When a man is over head and ears in debt you cannot speak to him upon a more unwelcome subject *than that of settling his accounts;* he had rather think of any thing than of his debts, and of what may be the end of them.

Just thus it is with the generality of Christians. They know very well that they do not live like men who must one day give an account of all their actions, and therefore they do not care of all things to think of *that day;* they hate the very thoughts of it, as some wretched people have done, who, when they have been under the sentence of death, have made themselves drunk, to keep off the *thoughts of death;*

SERM. LXI.

not that they hoped thereby to escape death, but to be easy for the present.

And is not this the *true reason* that most people strive to be in a hurry of business, or pleasures, that they may not think of themselves, or of what may become of them when they die? Yes, *most certainly*.

But then Christians should seriously consider, that the decrees of God will *stand firm*, though they never think of them; and that God "will give to every man according to his ways, and according to the fruit of his doings," though all the world should resolve not to lay to heart the dreadful consequences of the judgment of that great day; or, which is as foolish, to put off the thought thereof till it is too late to prepare for it.

[Jer. 32. 19.]

But that we may not do so, let us remember what our Lord said of the *rich man* and *Lazarus;* that the soul of the first went directly to a place of misery, as soon as ever it was parted from the body; and that the soul of poor Lazarus was carried by the angels into paradise, called Abraham's bosom: so that you see, Christians, it is not very long before we shall, *every soul of us,* be in a state of happiness or misery, there to remain until the day of judgment, even as soon as ever death parts our souls from our bodies. After that "the night cometh, when no man can work." "There is no repentance in the grave." This life is the DAY OF GRACE, *the time of trial.* If we live as we should do, during the time God affords us in which to work out our salvation, we are sure to be happy for ever; and if we live in sin, and die without being converted, we are sure to be miserable for ever and ever.

[Luke 16.]

What is it then that people flatter themselves with? Is it with hopes that God will be more merciful to them than He has declared in His Word? or is it because they hope to come off as well as others? or is it because they do not firmly believe a judgment to come? Lord help us! that Christians should so easily deceive themselves to their own ruin!

Suppose people will shut their eyes, and harden their hearts, and will not believe the terrors of the world to come, till they sadly feel them; what do they get by this? Will their unbelief make the truth of God of none effect? Will God change

His word, and His purposes, and stop His judgments because sinners do not believe, or do not mind His threatenings?

But they hope God will be merciful to them, after all; and these hopes are apt to make them less fearful of offending, and less careful of their ways.

Pray let us consider how far God has declared *that His mercy shall reach.*

He knows whereof we are made, and that we have made ourselves liable to His anger; in great mercy, therefore, He sent His own Son to redeem us. He knows we are weak, and that we have many enemies and temptations to struggle with; in great mercy, therefore, He offers grace and assistance to all such as earnestly pray for it. He knows that we are ignorant, and His mercy has given us a rule and a law to walk by; and when we have broke this law (as we are but too apt to do), He will in mercy accept of our sincere repentance.

Besides all this, His mercy has provided *a reward of everlasting life* for all such as strive to obey Him sincerely, though they should fail in many things.

Now, these are all instances of God's great goodness to sinful men. But then there are persons to whom God has declared *that He will not shew any mercy or favour:* even to all such as, having these mercies proposed to them, do yet despise them; who live in sin, and die without repentance and without bringing forth fruits meet for repentance.

Hear what St. Paul saith: "Be not deceived," (that is, do not hope for God's mercy while you go on to break His commandments;) "for neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor effeminate, nor abusers of themselves with mankind, nor thieves, nor covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor extortioners, shall inherit the kingdom of God." So that you see, Christians, we must not depend upon mercy, but upon the terms of the Gospel, which are, *faith* and *repentance,* and doing works answerable to amendment of life. 1 Cor. 6. 9.

And let us not fancy that God cannot be angry, and severely too, with sinners. He hath given us instances that He *can* and *will* be so, against such as despise His long-suffering, and goodness, which ought to lead us to repentance. He destroyed the whole world, except eight persons, for their

SERM. LXI.

wickedness. He destroyed Sodom with fire and brimstone. He cast off His own people, the Jews, and dispersed them through the world, to be a standing example to mankind, not to provoke the goodness of God at their peril, nor to expect His pardon and favour without striving to deserve them.

But then people are apt to comfort themselves with these thoughts: It will not be worse with me than with the rest of the world. *Poor comfort,* God knows; and yet, it is to be feared, too many support their spirits with this delusion, and think they need not be more afraid of what may come hereafter, than every body about them. And yet, *in this world,* nobody cares to be miserable for company, or *undone* because some desperate people do not care what becomes of them.

All serious people will be wiser than so, and will be awakened by the terrors of our Lord's *second coming,* to lay hold of the mercy offered them in His *first coming,* which was *to call men to repentance and amendment of life;* that, when our Lord comes again to judge the world in righteousness, (that is, in *justice,*) we may be found in the number of those who shall be thought worthy to escape that frightful sentence: "Go, ye cursed, into everlasting fire."

Now, this should oblige us *all* to *two duties* especially; First, *to repent us truly of all our sins past;* and secondly, *to be very careful of our thoughts, words, and actions, for the time to come.*

By a *timely repentance* we shall be restored to God's favour; and by a *wary* and a *sober life,* for the time to come, we shall have the comfort of being assured that our repentance was sincere.

Whoever is not prevailed on to take this method *must, all his life long, be subject to bondage;* he cannot but be afraid of *death,* and of that *judgment* which must follow.

And this all Christians are so well satisfied of, that they could have no satisfaction in this life, but only in hopes of repenting, and being reconciled to God sometime before they die; by which *sad delusion,* infinite numbers of souls have been lost for ever, and infinite numbers are like to follow them, unless Christians can be persuaded to see the danger of a *death-bed repentance.*

Christians, for the most part, are but too careless how they live, and only think of making a *good end,* as they call it; that is, to be sorry that they have not been converted sooner; to pray God to forgive them; to make fair promises of becoming new men, if it shall please God to spare them: and to be recommended to the mercy and favour of God by His ministers.

After all, this is not repentance unto salvation; for one must not only be sorry for what he has done amiss; he must not only beg God's pardon and resolve to amend; but, to prove that his repentance is sincere, he must redeem his misspent time, and bring forth fruits meet for repentance; he must not only *promise to become,* but really *be, a new man;* lest he find himself in the condition of unhappy Esau, "who found no place for repentance, though he sought it earnestly with tears." Heb. 12. 17.

Christians should therefore consider seriously, that the terms of salvation are fixed in the Gospel, and unalterable; that *without holiness no man must see the Lord;* that the state of those that defer their repentance grows every day more desperate, because God withdraws His grace as men despise it; that the judgment of the unfruitful tree, "Cut it down, why cumbereth it the ground?" may be passed upon a sinner when he least thinks of it; that the merciful invitation, "Seek ye the Lord while He may be found," does suppose, that there is a time when He will not be found of them that seek Him; and that the state of sinners may be so provoking, that though never so many prayers should be made for them; though *Noah, Daniel,* and *Job,* should pray for them; yet God will not hear their prayers. [Heb. 12. 14.] [Luke 13. 7.] Isa. 55. 6.

If these considerations, and the uncertainty of life, on one hand, and the glorious promises of an endless life on the other, will not prevail with people to repent in time, and to prepare for death, and the judgment that must follow, their hearts must be as hard as the nether mill-stone, and they must undoubtedly perish, and that without remedy.

To prevent this dreadful punishment, all serious people will endeavour to keep the *great day of judgment* much in their thoughts; and *these* will be the *fruits* of their doing so: they will first consider, *that God is to be their Judge;*— God, "whose eyes are open upon all the ways of the sons of [Jer. 32. 19.]

SERM. LXI.

men;—God, "who will bring every work into judgment, and every secret thing, whether it be good or whether it be evil."—God, who will then "make manifest the counsels of the heart."

[Eccl. 12. 14; 1 Cor. 4. 5.]

These considerations also will put a stop to a thousand evils to which our corrupt hearts are subject: am I sure that this base action, which I am going to do, must one day be brought to light, and the world must see how unlike an honest man, how unlike a Christian, I acted, in hopes that I should never be discovered?

Shall I oppress the poor and helpless, because it is in the power of my hand to do it; when at that *great day* he will be as great as I, and will have this advantage of *me*, that the Almighty God will then plead his cause for him against them that had him in contempt?

Shall I take pleasure in works of darkness, such as cannot bear the light *now;* when I believe they must then be made manifest to the eternal shame and confusion of all that lived in them?

Shall the fear of man make me ashamed or afraid of doing my duty, after so plain warning given me by my Judge Himself? "fear not them which kill the body, but are not able to kill the soul; but rather fear Him, which is able to destroy both soul and body in hell."

Matt.10.28.

Shall I set my heart upon the world, when the same Lord and Judge has so plainly shewed the folly of doing so, by one short question; "What shall it profit a man, if he shall gain the whole world and lose his own soul?"

[Matt. 16. 26.]

Shall I take upon me to judge, to censure, and to condemn the actions of others; when I neither know the motives nor reasons of their actions: in express contradiction to the command of God, who has said, "judge nothing before the time;" and "why dost thou judge thy brother?" For "we shall all stand before the judgment-seat of Christ."

[1Cor.4.5.] Rom. 14. 10—12.

In one word: people of any sort of consideration will immediately put a stop to every evil *thought*, to every *design*, to every *word*, to every *action*, which they have reason to fear will rise up in judgment against them at that day; or, if they have not put a stop to them, they will resolve to repent heartily and in time; to make *restitution* where they have done injuries, as far as they can, and justice requires; *to do*

good, while it is in their power, and *to communicate*, remembering, *that with such sacrifices God is pleased*, and appeased; to be sincere and upright in all their actions, because our Judge is the searcher of hearts; lastly, to improve all their talents and opportunities of doing good and glorifying God, because they are then to give an account of them.

But the COMING OF CHRIST to judge the world is matter of *comfort* to Christians, as well as *terror*. "Then," saith the Apostle, "shall every man have praise of God;" that is, every man that has endeavoured to deserve it. And our Lord and Judge has expressly set down the sentence He will pass upon His faithful servants at that day: "Come ye blessed of My Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world." And that we may not expect judgment without mercy (unless we have been unmerciful to others), the Apostle assures us, that "we have not an High-Priest which cannot be touched with the feeling of our infirmities; but was in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin." We may therefore hope for all the favour that our case will bear.

1 Cor. 4. 5.

Matt.25.34.

Heb. 4. 15.

Besides all this, the innocence of injured persons will then be vindicated; the reputations which have been unjustly blasted will then be set right; good men will then receive a recompence for the injuries they met with, and patiently suffered; the poor who have served God to the best of their power, will then find sufficient amends for what they wanted in this world; the rich, who were so wise as *to make to themselves friends of the mammon of unrighteousness*, will find themselves no losers by their charity; and the persecuted for righteousness' sake will here find that blessedness which their Saviour so faithfully promised.

[Luke 16. 9.]

In one word: now the *merciful shall obtain mercy*; now the pure in heart shall see God; now they that did hunger and thirst after righteousness shall be filled; now the meek shall inherit the earth, the new earth, wherein dwelleth righteousness; and now the poor in spirit, and the peace-makers, shall inherit the kingdom of heaven. For this is the day of recompence, in which every man shall receive according to his works done in the body, whether they have been good or bad.

[Matt.5.7.]

SERM. LXI.

And let no man think that his condition will free him from a strict account at that day. All have received talents more or less; and all are accountable for them. Even they that have received the least will find it so. For we are sent into the world upon *trial*. Some have riches and plenty, to try what use they will make of them; whether they will be kind to their fellow-creatures that are in want; whether they will use their abundance with sobriety, be thankful and humble. Others are poor, to see whether they will behave themselves honestly, be content with their condition, and rely upon God, who can and will, if they deserve it, make up in the next life what they want in this. Some are in authority, and others are bound to obey; some are in affliction, whilst others enjoy prosperity; some are ignorant, and others learned; some make a figure in the world, and many are scarcely taken notice of. And yet all these different states and conditions are designed to fit us for a blessed eternity, which all are made for, and all are capable of enjoying, if it be not their own fault. And the rule by which we must all be judged will not be, *how great or how learned* we have been, but *how we have behaved ourselves* in that state of life in which the providence of God did place us; *with this difference*,— to whom much was given, of him much will be required.

Now, the sum of what I have been saying is this, and what I would desire we may all carry home with us; namely, that there will be a *day of judgment* as sure as there is a God; there will be such a day, whether men believe it, whether they think of it or not. The Gospel is the rule by which we must all be judged. The rules of the Gospel, by which we must be judged, are plain and positive. In short; they are these: that all sin unrepented of shall be punished with everlasting flames; and that all such as, being awakened by these terrible truths, do forsake every evil way, do judge and condemn themselves, that they may not be condemned of the Lord, shall be pardoned and made eternally happy. So that nothing can secure us against the worst that can happen, but a timely repentance. But then we must remember, that no repentance can be depended upon, but where men live to *bring forth fruits meet for repentance*, that is, answerable to amendment of life. [Matt. 3. 8]

And pray let us consider, that of all who are already dead the condition is unalterable; they are in a state of happiness or misery, and will be so for ever; and this will be the condition of every one of us, of myself, and of all you that hear me, within a very few years.

Inspire us, gracious God, with a true sense of the danger we are in; that we may no longer follow our corrupt inclinations; that we may no longer put off our conversion; that we may not be indifferent and careless, when *Death, Judgment, Heaven,* and *Hell,* are the things we are deliberating about.

May the continual thoughts of death mortify in us all pride and vanity, all covetousness and worldly-mindedness, all carnal security and fondness for this life, and oblige us to a strict watchfulness, while we continue in this state of trial!

May the consideration of a *judgment to come* oblige us to a sincere holiness, and make us careful of our thoughts, designs, words, and actions; oblige us to try, to examine, to judge ourselves, and to endeavour to appease our Judge, by prayers, by tears, by alms, by mortification, and by all other expressions of a true repentance, that in the day of visitation we may find mercy.

And if the difficulties of an holy life affright us, if the commands of Jesus Christ seem hard to flesh and blood, let us consider, who can dwell with everlasting burnings? The good Lord grant, that we *may* consider and take pains *now,* that we may escape the bitter pains of eternal death! "This day," saith our blessed Saviour to the penitent thief, [Luke 23. 43.] "this day shalt thou be with Me in paradise." And oh! that the constant expectation of that happy day, and a faith and hope full of immortality, may sweeten all the troubles of this mortal life, raise, O Lord, our sense and value for the joys of paradise so high, that we may no longer doat upon the short appearances of happiness we meet with here!

O Jesus, who hast redeemed us with Thy precious blood, deliver us from the dreadful judgment of the last day, that we may be numbered with Thy saints in glory everlasting, for Thy mercy's sake! To Whom, with the Father, &c.

SERMON LXII.

THE DUTY OF SELF-DENIAL.

1 Cor. xv. 32, 33.

See Numb. 23. 10; Deut. 32. 29; Isa. 22. 12, 13; 56. 12; Luke 12. 20; Heb. 9. 27.

Let us eat and drink, for to-morrow we die. Be not deceived: evil communications corrupt good manners.

There is nothing *so serious*, but wicked men will make a jest of it. To make a jest of *dying* is so monstrous, that one would think human nature could hardly be capable of it. But the truth is, very many who dare not *speak* at this rate, do yet live at this rate: that is, they will not deny themselves any sort of satisfaction this life affords, *let what will follow;* they will enjoy the good things of this world while they can, and not trouble their heads or their hearts with cares and fears of what may come hereafter; in short, *death*, let them talk of it never so familiarly, is the very least of their thoughts.

We are not now speaking of wicked infidels, who believe nothing of a world to come; but of the generality of Christians, who profess to believe a judgment to come, and rewards and punishments in another life: even many of these are as little concerned for the condition in which death will put them as the merest heathens.

They that are rich are but too apt to take it for granted, that they have a right to please themselves in spending their incomes.

They that need not work for their daily bread, but have time to spare, conclude that it cannot be better spent than in diverting themselves.

Such as are young will very hardly be persuaded to believe any other, but that *theirs* is the age of pleasure and delight,

and that it would be ridiculous to talk of *death* to them that are but just come into the world.

And even when men come to be old, they are apt to put the thoughts of death far from them, and to make the remainder of their lives as easy and pleasant as possibly they can, by not thinking of what must become of them when they die.

So that, in short, corrupt nature, multitude of examples, an untoward way of reasoning, all combine and plead for *this: that the great business of life is to make ourselves easy while we may;* that we need not *deny ourselves, nor take up the cross;* and that, if it is forced upon us, we may lay it down as soon as ever we can; and that to do otherwise would be to make ourselves fools and miserable without any reason: for who would not be easy when he may?

And the truth is, these are things so very grateful to flesh and blood, that one would despair of ever convincing Christians of the necessity of laying restraints upon themselves, if Jesus Christ and His Apostles had not so often declared *the absolute necessity of self-denial* in order to eternal happiness, and by their examples and voluntary sufferings taught us, how very little the pleasures or the miseries of this world are in comparison of those of the next life.

The Apostle St. Paul, whose words we have chosen for the text, was well aware how very apt people are to indulge themselves, and to persuade others to do so too: "Let us eat and drink, for to-morrow we die;" to which sort of argument he makes this reply: "Be not deceived; evil communications corrupt good manners:" that is, take care of being led into a wicked error—of believing, for instance, that to cast away care is the way to be freed from it; that to strive to please one's self is the way to be happy; and that, when we die there is an end of all pleasure as well as pain. For these are not the reasonings of people who live by Scripture, but they are the discourses of such as, having corrupted themselves, desire to corrupt all others, that they may have companions in their infidelity. This is what is plainly implied in St. Paul's answer.

Now, that which I aim at in the discourse I am going to make upon these words is this:

SERM. LXII.

First; we acknowledge that what such people say is really true; "to-morrow we die;" that is, our time is really short, and we ought to make use of it while it lasts. But then,

Secondly; this is no reason why we should give up ourselves to sensual pleasures; for these will neither make our lives longer, nor our deaths happy. But,

Thirdly; this is what, in all reason, we should resolve upon: that since we must die so soon, our hearts shall not be set upon such pleasures as will make us forget the end of our creation; such as will make death more bitter to us when we come to die, and will quite unfit us for that happiness which after death good men are sure to enjoy.

Lastly; therefore we ought, as we value our souls, to avoid the company and conversation of all such as would persuade us, either by their words or examples, to follow our natural inclinations, which, if we do not resist them, will infallibly ruin us for ever.

I. And first, *This is certainly true,* TO-MORROW WE DIE; our lives are short, and they are uncertain; we may die in a few days, but we *shall* die in a few years. Why, all people own this. That is very true. But then, there is a great deal of difference betwixt owning a thing, and considering, and being convinced of its importance.

A man that considers, and is convinced of any thing of moment that concerns himself, will have it much in his thoughts, and much at heart. Is it thus that Christians are convinced of the shortness and uncertainty of this present life? Is it thus they are convinced of the reality of a life after death? It is plain they are not. Shall it be said, for instance, that men who make no scruple how they live, no conscience of their ways, who spend their lives in sin and vanity, who know they are sinners, and at enmity with God, and yet never think of making their peace by a timely repentance; can it be said with any truth, that such are *convinced* that they are in a very little time, perhaps ere this day twelvemonth, to die; and that from that moment, if they die in their sins, they are to be miserable for ever.

And indeed this is the case, not only of such as live in open rebellion against God, but of all such as pass their days without any concern whether they have got such

habits of *virtue*, of *piety*, *humility*, *charity*, and *purity*, as are absolutely necessary to fit them for heaven.

Let us but observe the behaviour of such as we are sure *are* convinced of the shortness of their time; such for instance as are under the *sentence of death*, or such as are seized with some mortal distemper. These we shall find, if they have any sense of religion, more concerned for their everlasting well-being, than for all the world beside. How seriously do they lament their misspent time! How much convinced are they of the madness of that mirth which made them put off their conversion! What self-denial, what mortification, would not they wish to have chosen, which might have cured them of those sins which now lie heavy upon their consciences?

It is but too plain that people in health are not generally thus affected, and therefore we justly conclude, that their belief of a life to come, and of the uncertainty of this life, is of little advantage to them; they have not considered what it is to die before they are prepared for such a change.

Indeed, if the bitterness of death were past, when once our heads are laid in the grave, it would be of no great moment what lives we lead, or what end we make; but when we have the greatest assurance, that "God will bring every work into judgment, and every secret thing, whether it be good or evil;" that "they that have done good shall go into life everlasting, and they that have done evil into everlasting fire;" the knowledge and belief of this makes death a very serious thing indeed, and not to be thought of, not to be spoken of, but with great concern. And it is as absurd to persuade people to divert themselves, and to drive away the thoughts of death, as to tell a man who is in debt, that the best way is not to think of his accounts, nor to make agreement with his creditors, till they have cast him into prison. [Eccles. 12. 14; Matt. 25. 41, 46.]

If Christians would but consider the work they have to do, "before the night cometh when no man can work," they would be better able to judge how much time of a short life they have to spend in sin and vanity. For besides the particular duties of every man's proper condition and calling; whether he be *magistrate* or *subject*, whether *master* or *servant*, whether *parent* or *child*, whether *poor* or *rich* (all these having their [John 9. 4.]

SERM. LXII.

proper duties to learn and to discharge as they will answer to God); besides these, we have another life to provide for: we have all sinned, and as we hope for pardon from God, [Matt. 3. 8.] we must all repent, and "bring forth fruits meet for repentance." We are all in the midst of temptations, and all stand in need of God's grace and assistance, which no man must expect without praying for them daily. And lastly, (*which I beseech you to take especial notice of,*) every soul who hopes to be happy in the next life *must be restored to the image of God, in which we were created,* before he leaves *this world.*

It will not be sufficient, after a long life spent in *vanity,* in thinking of nothing but the things of this world, or it may be in sinful pleasures; it will not be enough to say when we come to die, I am sorry I have lived at this careless rate, and I hope God will forgive me and make me happy; for be assured of it, good Christians, every one that does not sincerely love God *here;* who does not desire to be like Him; who does not love what He loves, and hate what He hates; who does not, with all his heart, desire to please God by keeping His commandments; who does not love his neighbour, do him good when it is in his power, be just to him in all his dealings, &c.; whoever has not strove to wean his affections from sensual pleasures, and made the service of God, in some good measure, his delight as well as his duty; whoever has not done this *here,* must not hope to be happy hereafter.

It is necessary, *absolutely necessary,* that Christians should [Phil. 2. 12.] know this, that they may "work out their salvation with fear and trembling;" that is, with the concern of people whose souls are at stake; that they may not only carefully avoid all such sins as make them enemies to God, and will shut them out of heaven, but that they may be always endeavouring to get such dispositions as may fit them for the company of saints and angels, by following the rules of the Gospel, which [Col. 1. 12.] are given us for this very purpose, "to make us meet to be partakers of the inheritance of the saints in light."

This is what Christians that have any concern for their souls should do; and one would hope that there are many (God increase their number!) that do so; but there are too many who choose another way of thinking and living, who think they make the best use of a short life by giving them

selves up either to *sensual pleasures,* or to the *cares of this world,* by which they may keep far from them *the thoughts of death.* But after all,

II. *This method will neither make their lives more easy, nor their deaths more happy.*

It will not make their lives more easy, because of the *ignorance,* the *uncertainty,* and the *fears,* which attend them. It is impossible a man can be easy, who is not sure but that he may be very miserable when he dies; who is so little satisfied with his own condition, that he does not care to think of it, or to know how it is like to go with him; who is forced to run into *company,* or *business,* or *pleasures,* to avoid the knowledge of himself.

We are apt enough to be fond of any thing which we think to be valuable in ourselves, and to be pleased with the thoughts of it; and therefore, when we care not for thinking of our souls, it is most sure we do not think them in any measure safe, and out of danger.

But however men may contrive to keep off the fears of death, neither business, nor pleasures, can keep off death itself. It is then men begin to see their error, when they find themselves going to be parted for ever from all earthly satisfactions, which till now had hindered them from considering their latter end; which the Wise Man thus truly sets forth: "O death! how bitter is the remembrance of thee to a man that liveth at rest in his possessions, unto the man that hath nothing to vex him, and that hath prosperity in all things." Ecclus. 41. 1. And the reason is, because he has no hopes of a better life, and is tormented to think of losing the happiness of this so soon.

III. And this leads us to the third thing which we mentioned; namely, *That this is what in all reason we should resolve upon; that since we must die so soon, not to set our hearts upon such things as will make us forget the end of our creation; such as will make death more bitter to us, and unfit us for that happiness which after death good men are sure to enjoy.*

Self-denial is a duty very much neglected, and yet it is what the Christian religion has made a means of our salvation. We all pretend to be making the best of our way to heaven, and most Christians are satisfied and hope to be happy without much trouble or hazard. On the other

SERM. LXII.

hand, that very Gospel which we take for our rule speaks very much of denying ourselves, of suffering afflictions, and teaches us that we must through much tribulation enter into the kingdom of heaven.

Christians may be apt to imagine that these and such-like Scriptures do not belong to us, but only to times of persecution. But, alas! Christians are in more danger *now* than in times of persecution. Now they are in danger of falling in love with the world, of setting up their rest here, of thinking themselves safe, of following their inclinations without control; in one word, of forgetting their latter end, and neglecting to prepare for it, by weaning their affections from the love of this world.

Now every Christian, who has made the experiment, knows for certain, that to bring one's mind to such a temper will require trouble, pains, and time; will be a work of conflict and tribulation. We must deny ourselves a great many things for which we have a great desire; we must not only avoid things in themselves *sinful*, but sometimes things that are *indifferent*, in order to get the mastery over our own will; we must not only avoid intemperance, but sometimes even moderate refreshment. So saith our Lord; "In those days shall My disciples fast;" not from *sin* only, as foolish people pervert the Scriptures, for that we are at all times to abstain from; but that fasting and mortification, which religion requires of us, consists in such a sparing use of the creatures, and in such a forbearance even from lawful pleasures, *sometimes*, as may deaden our love for the world, and hinder us from being captivated by it. And therefore a very great man, and most extraordinary Christian[a], was used to say that to deny one's self in things indifferent (consistent with health and civility) was a secret, the greatest one friend could communicate to another.

[Mark 2. 20; Luke 5. 35.]

Pursuant to this, we must not only forsake the company and conversation of the wicked and profane, but sometimes *even all company*, that we may be better able to take an account of the state of our souls, that we may make the thoughts of death easy to us, by preparing for it; and that we may loosen the bands that fasten us to the world.

[a] Dr. More. [Life of Dr. Henry More by Richard Ward. 8vo. London, 1710, p. 108.]

And one may say with truth, that when men will not afflict themselves, it is usual with God, in the way of His providence, to bring afflictions upon them whether they will or not; and especially upon those whom He owns for His children; because all sin must be punished either here or hereafter.

And though we are apt to complain of the miseries, the disappointments, and the crosses of this life, yet indeed they are the greatest blessings we meet with: they bring us, if we do not resist His will, they bring us the very nearest way to God; they are necessary, and they are designed, to fit us for heaven; to *awaken*, to *convince*, and to *reduce* us, when we forget or neglect the ONE THING NEEDFUL, the care of our souls.

I shall conclude this particular with the words of Jesus Christ, in the account of the rich man and Lazarus: "Son, remember that thou in thy life-time receivedst thy good things, and likewise Lazarus his evil things; but now he is comforted, and thou art tormented." The remembrance of which words will ever serve to two excellent purposes; they will *restrain* us when we are eagerly fond of the good things of this life, lest we should receive all our good here; and they will comfort those that want what the world doats on, in hopes that what they want *here*, if it is not their own fault, will be made up to them hereafter. [Luke 16. 25.]

IV. By this time, Christians, you have in part seen *how carefully you should avoid the company and conversation of loose people, and people of loose principles*, especially of such as do make a jest of *self-denial*, and would lead us, by their words or example, *to follow our own natural inclinations*.

And yet the most ignorant Christian knows this is wrong; and if they have any spark of grace, they take care that their children shall not have *their will*, because they know it would ruin them.

They know, for instance, that if they may keep what company they please, they will never learn any thing that is good; that if they fall into idle company, they will never be serious; if they may please their own appetites, they will be gluttons or drunkards.

Why now, is not this the case of older people, who, by the

SERM. LXII.

company they keep, get habits of *intemperance,* of *sloth,* of *trifling* away their time, till at last they forget *themselves,* their *God,* and their *latter end,* and act as foolishly as if they had but the sense and the resolution of children?

But even this is not the worst of keeping the company of evil men. There is manifestly a spirit of *infidelity,* of *profaneness,* of *irreligion,* gone out into the world; and a man can hardly go into a mixed company, but he is in danger of infection; and a thousand to one but he leaves the company less *serious,* less *resolved,* or less *holy,* than when he went into it.

There are every where too many who make a jest of things sacred, and who, because they know they cannot reason men out of their religion and hopes of heaven, will endeavour to laugh them out of their seriousness, and out of their senses; which is very often the effect of revelling and drunkenness.

There are few people but at the beginning think themselves proof against such contagion, who yet live to see themselves sadly mistaken; they make the liberties other people take a measure for their own; and do not know, perhaps, that the man they admire is at the bottom an errant atheist, who therefore lives according to his principles. You believe a God, a judgment, and rewards and punishments hereafter, and yet you live just as he does; it is great odds that you will believe as he does at the long run, whatever you may think for the present. [Hos. 4. 11.] "Wine, and new wine" (saith Solomon), "take away the heart;" you will find it so to your sorrow, when death approaches, and when it will be too late to return to a sober mind.

In short; in whatever company men make a mock of sin, speak lightly of *God,* His *word,* His *ministers,* His *house,* His *day,* or of any thing that *belongs to Him;* Satan governs in that company, inspires his instruments, infects more or less all that are present, and they certainly become more his servants than before.

So that, in truth, nothing but an obstinate resolution of avoiding the company and conversation of men of loose *principles,* and loose *manners,* can hinder a man from forfeiting that grace, which alone can secure him from being abandoned of God, and given up to a reprobate mind.

To come to a conclusion of this discourse, and to the uses we ought to make of it:

And first, no Christian ought to be easy till he can have some comfortable hopes, that it will not be worse with him in the next world than it is in this. And I beg you will believe and remember this important truth, *that a timely preparation for death will deliver us from the fear of death, and from all other fears.*

If you find a satisfaction in forgetting yourself, and diverting the thoughts of death, depend upon it, your case is bad; for it is the case of every good Christian as well as St. Paul's, TO ME TO DIE IS GAIN. And though *nature* will not subscribe to this, yet *grace* will.

And be assured of this, that he who attempts to get rid of his fears by running from God, will most certainly increase them, as every man will find who runs into company as a remedy against thinking.

It is astonishing to see Christians very well pleased to hear the most serious things made a jest of; it is not because such things are ridiculous, but because men's lives are corrupt, and they wish secretly that there were no truth in the things they have believed. But then how sad is their case, who have no comfort but in hopes that God's Word may prove false!

That you may avoid the witchery of EVIL COMMUNICATIONS, be persuaded to believe, *that one need but taste a sinful pleasure a very little, to become fond of and a slave to it.* This is seldom considered till the poison is swallowed, and men are become incurable.

In short; whether people are in jest or in earnest when they speak of dying, death is a very serious subject; nothing on earth ought to divert us from thinking of and preparing for it; the moment we die, our fate is determined for ever and ever. This we should often think of, lest the health we enjoy, and the seeming distance of entering upon eternity, should make us careless.

To prevent this, let us keep a strict watch over all our senses, lest intemperance get the mastery over us; remembering the warning Jesus Christ has given us, "Take heed Luke 21. 34.
lest at any time your hearts be overcharged with surfeiting,

SERM. LXII.

and drunkenness, and the cares of this life, and so that day overtake you unawares."

And now I believe I have said enough to persuade every serious Christian, that has heard and understands me, to resolve to set apart some time in every week of his life to think of death, and to ask himself, how he is prepared for it? And that I may help his meditations on that subject, I will just set before him what a wise man, when he comes to die, will wish he had done.

He will then wish, that he had made a just and Christian settlement of his temporal concerns, so as not to be distracted with the cares of this world, when his heart and thoughts should be upon another.

He will then wish, that he had made his peace with God, by a timely repentance; that he had lived to God's glory in discharging faithfully the duties of his calling; that he had weaned his affections from, and loosened the bands that fasten us to the world.

He will wish, that he had crucified the flesh with all its sinful lusts; that being weary of this life, he might be more desirous of a better; and that by acts of mercy and charity, he had entitled himself to the mercy of God at the hour of death, and the day of judgment, when he will most stand in need of it.

And lastly, he will then wish, that he had got such habits of patience and resignation to the will of God during his health, as may render death, with all the train of evils leading to it, less frightful and amazing.

These are the things we shall all wish for when death approaches; and these should be the practice of every Christian's life; which God grant they may, and especially of myself, and of every one that now hears me.

SERMON LXIII.

THE MISTAKES OF CHRISTIANS CONCERNING REPENTANCE.

Acts iii. 19.

Repent ye therefore, and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out.

See Ps. 32. 1, 5; 38. 18; 51. 13; Jer. 3. 12, 13; Matt. 3. 8, 9; Luke 24. 46, 47; Acts 17. 30, 31; 2 Cor. 7. 10; Tit. 2. 11.

Most people are very ready to own that they are *sinners*; and that they stand in need of God's mercy and pardon. And all Christians pretend to know, that without repentance nobody can possibly be restored to God's favour, or ever attain that happiness which we all hope for after death. And repentance being a natural duty, most Christians, by considering what they expect from others who have wronged or offended them, are convinced that something agreeable to that will be expected by God from such as have offended *Him*.

Notwithstanding all this, repentance is a duty the *most neglected* and *mistaken* of any other Christian duty.

It is generally put off to the last.

People are apt to think that repentance is necessary *only* where men have fallen into great and crying sins; and when, upon any consideration whatever, they have left off to commit such sins, they look upon themselves as in a hopeful way of salvation.

Many are apt to imagine, that repentance is nothing but a concern and sorrow for having done amiss, and trusting that God, for Christ's sake, will pardon them; and too, too many place repentance in confessing their sins, protesting to be sorry for them, and promising not to repeat them; and are satisfied with this, without any serious endeavours of amendment.

And lastly, most Christians imagine, that repentance is in their own power; that they can set about it, and perform it,

SERM. LXIII.

when *they* please; and do not know that it is *the gift of God,* and that it must, as all other graces, be asked of God with earnestness, humility, and with a sincere design of forsaking every evil way.

Now such mistakes as these will be an occasion of very sad consequences; and too many Christians (it is to be feared) will find those sins charged upon them, at the great account, which they did suppose they had repented of, and were forgiven them.

To prevent *these mistakes* as much as may be, Christians should consider, that *repentance* and *conversion* are *not to be separated.* The Spirit of God has joined them together in the text: "Repent, and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out." And, Acts xxvi. 20, "Repent, and turn to God, and do works meet for repentance." Not to mention many more passages in the sacred Scriptures, where this is expressly said, or intimated.

Now, if this were well considered, Christians would have other thoughts of repentance than what they generally entertain. They would see plainly, for instance,

That if *to repent* is *to be converted,* then no degree of sorrow, no acts of mortification, which do not produce amendment of life, can be *true repentance;*

That not only *notorious sinners* have need of repentance to be reconciled unto God, but that all who are born in sin *are the children of wrath,* and have therefore need, by repentance, to be restored to God's favour and acceptance;

That there is *no true conversion,* and therefore *no true repentance,* where men forsake *some* sins only, and live in others; all sins being forbidden of God, and displeasing to Him;

That if a sincere resolution of forsaking the sins men *confess* do not accompany their confession, it is what the wickedest man on earth may do, as well as the most holy, and therefore can be no sure mark of *true repentance.*

That to *resolve to repent* without calling in the assistance of God's grace, would be as absurd as to attempt to raise the dead, or to command light out of darkness, or to make a new creation; forasmuch as *to be converted* is to become a *new creature;* it is to be turned *from darkness to light;* it is to be

raised from the *death* of sin unto the *life* of righteousness, which none but God can effect; and

Lastly; Christians would easily perceive the great absurdity of *putting off repentance unto the last,* because if a man cannot give a proof of his repentance by a change of life, he will want one of the *greatest comforts* of a *death-bed;* one of the best marks of *a repentance unto life,* which is *doing works meet for repentance;* that is, answerable to amendment of life.

In short; repentance is a means by which a sinner is restored to the favour of God; *it is a step to conversion:* but if *conversion* do not follow, it is only *a repentance to be repented of.*

And Christians sadly deceive themselves when they imagine, that any thing less than being restored to the image of God, in which we were at first created, can restore us to God's favour. "If any man be in Christ" (saith the Apostle), "If any man be in Christ," that is, a sincere Christian, "he is a new creature;" his former life and affections are changed for the better; he sets his heart upon things above; he has quite other aims than he had before; for now he follows no longer the inclinations of corrupted nature, but denies himself, resists temptations, prays for grace to withstand them, and finds a real pleasure in mortifying his corrupt affections. "Behold, all things are become new," saith the Apostle; a new heart, new desires, an enlightened understanding, a will obedient to the will and law of God. Where repentance ends in *this,* it is such as it should be; *it is repentance unto life not to be repented of.* 2 Cor. 5. 17.

Now, that all our humiliations and repentance may have this blessed effect, *to turn us from darkness unto light, and from the power of Satan unto God;* it is absolutely necessary, that we be thoroughly convinced of this *great truth,* that we have in us the seeds of all manner of wickedness, ready to spring up, and break out into sinful actions upon the first occasion, if not restrained by the grace of God. We are all of the same *race* and *make* with *St. Peter,* who denied his Lord and Saviour; with *Judas,* who betrayed Him; with *Pilate,* who condemned Him against his conscience; with the *Jews,* who crucified Him; with *Herod,* who murdered the innocent children; with the *men of Sodom,* whose sin was punished with

SERM. LXIII.

fire and brimstone; and with *those of the old world,* who brought upon themselves a universal destruction.

Though, I say, the corruption of our nature has not discovered itself in such wickedness as these, yet we have the *root* and *seed of all these,* and *of all other sins, in us;* and we ought to know this, and to know, that *on this account* we are utterly unfit for the favour of God; and should certainly feel His everlasting displeasure, but that Jesus Christ has purchased our redemption by His most precious blood; and has put us into a way of regaining the favour of God, and of attaining everlasting salvation, if we are not wanting to ourselves.

I say again, that it is absolutely necessary that we should *know* and *feel this our miserable estate and condition;* to the end, that seeing our misery, we may more earnestly look out for help, embrace it when it is offered us, and be careful not to provoke the divine justice to leave us to ourselves, and in that sad estate into which we are fallen; that we may be afraid to make our condition worse by continuing in rebellion against God, when He is so gracious as to pardon us upon our sincere repentance, and change of heart and life; and lastly, that feeling our misery, we may not defer our repentance till it be too late to recover that image of God which we have lost in the fall.

Indeed the corrupt heart of man can find out many motives to repentance less painful than this; but this is the true Gospel motive: "They that are whole" (saith our Lord) "need not a physician, but they that are sick:" they will feel the need they have of help; they will perceive the necessity, not only of forsaking the sins they have been guilty of, but of mortifying that corrupt nature which is the spring and source of all sin.

Matt. 9. 12.

In order to *this,* they will thankfully lay hold of the means of salvation offered them by Jesus Christ; they will receive *Him* for their Saviour and Law-giver, and *His Gospel* as the rule by which they ought to live, since by it they must be judged.

In short; they will not, they cannot be easy, until, by the grace of God, they have in some good measure overcome their evil and corrupt affections; until they see and are per-

suaded that there is a change wrought in them for the better. And this, not on account of any worldly considerations (for that is the repentance of heathens); but because they *now* perceive, that sin is an offence to God; that the laws of God are just and good, and that men are highly guilty before God who break them; that therefore they think themselves bound in duty and gratitude to strive with all their might to keep the commandments of God, and by this means to gain His favour, and such dispositions as may fit them for heaven.

I have already shewn you, good Christians, that the *first step* to repentance is to know, and be sensible of it, *that we are by nature subject to all manner of wickedness;* and that our nature must be changed before we can hope for any communion with God, or by Him to be made happy.

I will *now* shew you how this must be done: our blessed Saviour Himself will direct you: "Come unto Me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest;" that is, If you are so sensible of your sad estate as to be weary of it, and in earnest desire to become new creatures, by faith in Me you shall be forgiven what is past, and by My spirit ye shall be enabled to put on *the new man, which after God is created in righteousness and true holiness:* that is, this great change is to be wrought only by faith in the Son of God, who died for us, to assure us of the sincere love of God for His poor creatures; and that He is thoroughly reconciled to *them,* if *they* will lay hold of the means He has proposed to them (in His Gospel) *for their conversion;* which are,—1st, a firm faith in the power of God. 2ndly; earnest prayer to God for light to see what is evil in us, and for strength to overcome and root it out. And 3rdly; a sincere endeavour to do what we are able to do: for God seeing us really desirous to please Him in what we are able, will not let us want grace to overcome all our corruptions, till at last we have recovered the image of God, *the new man.*

[Matt. 11. 28.]

[Eph. 4. 24.]

In short, and to be as plain as possible, THE END OF RELIGION *is, to make men more perfect and happy than they are by nature;* that God may take delight in us, seeing us in some good measure, restored to His own likeness.

In order to this, the Christian religion proposeth to us *Jesus Christ,* as having by His meritorious death and passion

SERM. LXIII.

obtained eternal redemption *for all such as should repent, and turn to God, and do works meet for repentance*; that is, God is pleased, for Christ's sake, to overlook the untowardness of our nature, and to make trial of us while we continue in this world, whether we will endeavour to regain such dispositions to virtue and holiness as may fit us for heaven.

In order to this, we are, by baptism, received into Christ's family, where we have His protection, the assistance of His Holy Spirit, and all other means necessary to make us *new creatures;* for a *new creation* we must be made, as ever we hope to be saved.

Now, all such as lay hold of this mercy, and strive sincerely
[2 Cor. 7. 1.] to *perfect holiness in the fear of God;* such as resolve to walk worthy of so great a favour; who, being truly sensible of their own weakness, depend entirely upon God's grace, and ask it most earnestly; who, knowing the dangers they are exposed to, do therefore walk warily, that they may avoid the temptations and snares of the devil; who, when they have done amiss, are sorry for it, and strive with all their might
Tit. 2. 12. to do so no more, *denying ungodliness and worldly lusts*, taking
Phil. 1. 27. care that their *conversation be such as becomes the Gospel of*
Matt. 6. 33. *Christ*, subjecting their wills to the will of God, *seeking first the kingdom of God, and His righteousness.*

Whoever has, by the grace of God, brought himself to live after this manner, may very truly be said to be *a new creation*, and as such acceptable to God, and worthy to be made by Him eternally happy.

By this time, I hope, good Christians, you see, that your everlasting welfare depends upon the sincerity of your repentance; that not only great and crying sins are to be repented of, but our very nature is to be changed, before we can hope to be approved of God; that no degree of sorrow, no outward signs of mortification or self-denial, will profit us, where there is not an inward conviction and conversion of the soul to God; that we mock God, and deceive ourselves most wretchedly, when we confess our sins without a full purpose of leaving them, and living better for the time to come; that a Christian's life is a *state of repentance*, in which he must always be getting the mastery over his corruptions, and labouring daily to grow better; that to defer our repent-

ance to the last, is to depend upon a miracle for our salvation, and a miracle which we have no reason to believe God will work for us, since we have provoked Him all our days to leave us to our own hard and impenitent hearts when we come to die.

Lastly, I hope by this time you are convinced, that repentance is not so much a *command* as a *privilege*, and the greatest favour that ever God offered to mankind. It is plain the Jews thought so: "Then hath God also to the Gentiles granted repentance unto life." A favour which they thought God would never have vouchsafed a people of whom they had the meanest opinion. [Acts 11. 18.]

But God, you see, has granted even to us Gentiles *this mighty favour*. Let us then not abuse this glorious privilege; let us not be bold to break the laws of God, because He has afforded us a remedy.

It is true indeed, that when God affords men time to repent, when He gives them grace to do so, when they live to bring forth fruits meet for repentance; these are all invaluable blessings. But still it is to be considered, that it is better not to sin, than after to repent. The father's answer to his eldest son ought to be well considered by those that will be making experiments, how gracious God may be to them upon their repentance: "I never disobeyed at any time thy commands." "Son," saith the father, "all that I have is thine." [Luke 15. 29, 31.]

The ways of sin are extremely dangerous, and true repentance is a work so laborious and irksome, that nothing but the hopes of salvation, with the assistance of God, could encourage any man to go through with it; and yet it is no burden, but a favour, since by it we escape eternal misery, to which no trouble ought to be compared.

To conclude: and let me once again admonish you, *That the design of religion is, to turn men from darkness to light;* that all hopes of pardon are vain and deceitful, when amendment of life does not follow; and that *that* repentance is not like to continue long, which is not accompanied with most hearty prayers to God for the continuance of His grace.

And be persuaded, good Christians, to believe, that it is because men are not truly *converted*, that they look upon

SERM. XLIII.

the Christian religion as a burden rather than a blessing, and the happiest state a man can choose.

The reason is plain : they repent (as they call it) of their sins, without changing their affections; they hug that very sin in their heart, which *custom* or *fear* makes them renounce with their lips; and then it is no wonder that they hate that religion which obliges them to hate what they are resolved to love.

In one word; let us not separate conversion from repentance, nor think we have made our peace with God, until we have pronounced a righteous judgment upon ourselves; and until we can say with truth, by the grace of God, my heart is changed as well as my outward behaviour; I hate, avoid, and pray against, those sins which formerly I loved and run headlong after; I now feel the blessing of being freed from the *slavery* of sin, which therefore I am resolved to resist all the days of my life. Then repentance would be counted a *favour*, and religion a *state of liberty*, and Jesus Christ our *best friend*, and His Gospel our *safest rule*, and His yoke easy, and His burden light.

Which God grant we may all experience to our present and everlasting comfort, through the same Jesus Christ our Lord.

SERMON LXIV.

PREACHED IN LENT.

THE CAUSES OF IMPENITENCY; AND WHAT IT IS WHICH HINDERS OUR CONVERSION.

HEB. xii. 1, 2.

Let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which does so easily beset us; and let us run with patience the race that is set before us, looking unto Jesus, the author [or beginner] *and finisher of our faith; who, for the joy that was set before Him, endured the cross, despising the shame, and is set down at the right hand of the throne of God.*

See Isa. 53. 11; Matt. 5. 29.

GOOD Christians! the Church now calling upon us all *to repent, to turn unto God, and to bring forth fruits meet for repentance,* I cannot think of a more proper subject to edify both you and myself, than to consider, *what it is which hinders men's repentance and conversion,* and makes them generally so unwilling to set about a work, which every body acknowledges to be so very necessary; that knowing the *causes of our impenitency,* we may, in good earnest, strive to remove them, and prevent that ruin which will most certainly follow, if we are NOT *converted, and if our sins are not blotted out.* [Acts 3. 19.] Or, in the words of the text, "Let us lay aside every weight," all worldly and carnal considerations, "and the sin that does so easily beset us;" that which does most hinder our conversion; "and let us run with patience the race that is set before us." And that we may be encouraged to do so, let us "look unto Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith, who, for the joy that was set before Him, endured the cross, despising the shame, and is set down at the right hand of the throne of God;" whose example, if any thing, will engage us to set

SERM. LXIV.

about the work of our salvation with patience and perseverance.

I. But first, we must lay aside *every weight*, whatever may hinder our conversion.

Now, the first and great occasion of impenitency which offers itself to our consideration is, *the little regard which Christians have for their souls, and consequently for that religion which alone can save their souls from ruin.*

Men put little or no value upon Christianity, because it cost them nothing to be made Christians. They found themselves entitled to all its blessings as soon as they knew that they had been baptized. And very often they are no farther concerned to ask, what the Christian religion requires of its professors, or what they shall lose by not minding its precepts. And what is the end of this? Why, very, very many leave the world without ever knowing why they came into it; and are gone into eternity without ever seriously considering what must become of them for ever.

This is a consideration so afflicting, that one cannot take too much pains to free Christians from a weight which will certainly sink them into endless misery, if it be not laid aside in time.

You will not meet with many people who will say, that they do not value the happiness of heaven, or the miseries of hell; but one may meet with very many, who must own, that they seldom lay seriously to heart either the value of the one, or the danger of the other; that is, they seldom or never think of them. And so in truth (though they dare not say so), they neither value the happiness of heaven, nor fear the miseries of hell; yea, though they profess to believe both the one and the other.

Christians will hardly believe this; but let us make the experiment: let a man, for example, ask himself, what is it I most value? Why, to be sure, that which takes up most of my thoughts and time. And is not that the little affairs which concern the body, and this life, only? Does my concern for my soul bear any proportion to the value God has put upon it, who gave His only Son for its redemption; or to the value which Jesus Christ has put upon it, who bids us "fear not them which kill the body," (for that must die of

[Matt. 10. 28.]

itself in a very little time,) "but rather fear Him who can destroy both body and soul to all eternity?" But how can I be said to fear God above all things, when I take no care to obey His laws? How can I be said to value my soul more than my life, when I perform all the duties of religion with the greatest indifferency, as if it were a matter of no moment whether God were pleased or displeased with my service?

Now, any Christian may very easily know whether he is not one of these careless people, who having no fear, no concern for their souls, have no thoughts of repentance, and therefore ought to have no hopes of salvation, until they become better disposed.

For instance: a Christian who does not firmly believe another life;—that what the Gospel saith of that life is most certainly true, that men shall be rewarded or punished hereafter, just as they have behaved themselves here, and that without a timely repentance no man can be saved: till a man is firmly persuaded of these things, and thinks of them with seriousness, all the arguments in the world will not prevail with him to set about the duty of repentance.

I know what will be said: *that all Christians believe these truths.* I am afraid they do not. I am sure they do not attend to them: for, if a man lives in known sin; if he does not care to be informed concerning his duty; if he does not see the necessity of a holy life; if he neglects to pray for God's grace, or prays for it after such a manner as shews that he does not know the danger of wanting it; if a man lives in the world as if there were nothing to be feared, no enemies, no temptations to be met with; if a man will not deny himself when he is told by our Lord Jesus Christ, "that no man can be His disciple who will not deny himself;" in one word, if a man is not awed by the fear of hell, or moved by the hopes of heaven, but lives in a general neglect of religion and duty, it is certain he does not believe the truths of the Gospel, though he should repeat the Creed every day. [Matt. 16. 24; Luke 14. 27.]

And this, as we said before, is one of the greatest hindrances to repentance. People do not see the danger they are in, because they do not heartily believe the Gospel,

SERM. LXIV.

and because they do not know that they are under God's displeasure. They do not apprehend that they are in the way of perdition.

This is one of those *weights* which men must lay aside, before they can think of a change.

They may be exhorted to repent, and they may be prevailed on to shew some outward signs of repentance; but a change for the better will never follow, until they are awakened into a true sense of the danger their souls are in, both on account of original sin, and the many actual transgressions of their lives. And if a Christian will not put to his own helping hand, in order to the laying aside this weight, his case will be desperate, and he will certainly be ruined.

My meaning is: before a man can set about the work of repentance in good earnest, he must beg of God to open his eyes, that he may see the wretched condition he is in, and feel the disorders to which he is by nature subject, until he cry out with David, "Mine iniquities are as a heavy burden, they are too heavy for me."

Ps. 38. 4.

When once God has awakened a sinner into a just sense of his condition and danger, he will not, he cannot be at rest, until he has made his peace with God, by a true repentance.

II. But this is not the only thing which hinders men from setting about the duty of repentance. There is another very common cause, and that is, *a carnal security*, or a presumption that one's condition is safer than indeed it is.

Most Christians are apt to think, that there is nothing easier than to be happy when they die. It is probable they will have other thoughts when they come to die. In the mean time, it is this presumption which very much hinders people from repenting, from *turning unto God*, and from *bringing forth fruits meet for repentance*.

They depend upon their Christian name; they depend upon a few outward observances; they go to church, but not out of a sense of their dependance upon God, but out of custom, or some worse motive; they abstain from many sins, not out of a reverence for the law of God, which has forbid them, but because they are scandalous in the eye of the world, or because they would be punished by the magis-

trate; they depend upon *the infinite goodness and mercy of God*, not considering, that the goodness of God ought to lead men to repentance; and that where it does not do so, "His anger will smoke against that man; and all the curses that are written in the law of God shall light upon him." Deut. 29. 20.

Nay, there are very many who make their minds easy, because they are no worse than others, who yet hope to be saved; and when they are exhorted to repent, they begin to compare lives with those about them; never laying it to heart, that it will neither be excuse nor comfort to any man that millions are undone besides himself.

Now, this *presumption*, that a man is not in any great danger, because he performs some outward duties of religion, and because he is not profligately wicked; this, I say, hinders the conversion of an infinite number of people: it is a weight that must be removed before men can think of repentance.

Notorious sinners know very well, that there is no manner of hopes for them without a change; and sometimes they are uneasy under the guilt of sin, and there is some hope that this uneasiness will make them in time think of repentance: but Christians who are easy because they are not scandalously wicked, or because they do some things which the Christian religion requires of them, such people seldom think of a change till it is too late, and very often die unconverted.

Now, in order to remove this dead weight, we should all seriously consider, that we are by nature born in sin, and the children of wrath; that the design of religion is to restore us to God's favour, by making us such as will please Him; that nothing but a sincere endeavour after holiness will please God; that religion cannot consist in any thing which an unconverted man can do as well as one who is converted; that therefore going to *church*, to the *sacrament*, *fasting*, and *alms-deeds*, are not at all pleasing to God, unless we pray out of a real sense of our wants, and dependance upon God; unless we receive the sacrament as a means whereby we may obtain the grace of God for the pardon of our sins past, and for the amendment of our lives for the future; un-

SERM. LXIV.

less we fast to punish ourselves for the sins we have committed, and that we may get the mastery over our corrupt affections; and unless we give alms in obedience to the command of Christ, *that we may obtain mercy at the hands of God, and that God may bless us in all our works:* unless, I say, we do these and other Christian duties out of a sense of our unworthiness, to the glory of God, and that we may thereby become better men, and better Christians, and more fit for heaven, all our religion will signify nothing; for nothing but holiness will please God, and save us from ruin.

III. There is, *thirdly*, another thing which hinders our repentance and conversion, and that is, *the difficulty of the work*.

Christians are certainly in the right, in believing that there is a great deal of difficulty in forsaking of evil habits, and in becoming virtuous. But if there is trouble in these, [Is. 33. 14.] it is sure much less than to *dwell with everlasting burnings*, which must be the portion of all those who will not forsake the pleasures of sin, that they may attain such virtues as may fit them for heaven.

[Prov. 26. 13.] But after all, it is only the slothful man that saith, "There is a lion in the way, a lion in the streets;" the most unlikely place, one would think, to meet with a lion. The truth is, when people have no mind to reform, any thing in the world will be pretence enough to hinder them from setting about the work.

But then let it be considered, that most people, some time of their lives, are convinced, that though true repentance be a very difficult work, yet that it is both necessary and in their power, by God's assistance, to go through with it. Why else do we hear Christians so often, when they are under apprehensions of death, or when their consciences are awake, cry out—I will defer my repentance no longer; by God's grace, if He spares my life, I will become a new man; by His assistance I will break off all my evil habits, though never so deeply rooted; nothing shall hinder me from so necessary a work.

Why now, Christians would never speak at this rate, if they were not persuaded, that by the grace of God they could overcome the greatest difficulties. And indeed so they can, provided they would in good earnest resolve to

repent, and sincerely ask God's assistance. "I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me," saith the Apostle. And our blessed Lord gives the true reason why men perish in their impenitency: "Ye will not come unto Me, that ye might have life." Phil. 4. 13. John 5. 40.

Jesus Christ does indeed intimate unto us the difficulty of repentance and a new life, when He commands us, "If thy right hand offend thee," that is, hinder thy conversion, or cause thee to offend, "cut it off;" but then He would never have given this direction, but that He knew we might do it by His gracious assistance, provided we ask it in sincerity. And when He assures us, that "straight is the gate and narrow is the way that leadeth unto life, and few there be that go in thereat;" it is not to discourage us from striving to attain eternal life, but to shew us the necessity of doing it with care and concern; of begging God's grace constantly; and of avoiding every thing that may hinder us in the race that is set before us. Matt. 5. 30. Matt. 7. 14.

IV. I shall only mention one other hindrance of men's repentance and conversion, and that is, *The hopes of repenting some time or other before they die, and so for the present laying aside the thoughts of it to any good purposes.*

Now, that this is a very great delusion, and the loss of infinite souls, is plain from hence, that Christians trust to that which is not in their own power; they depend upon God's goodness, and that He will hereafter dispose their hearts more strongly to repentance; that is, they hope that God will be more merciful, the more He is provoked; they depend upon a life, which they own to be uncertain; they depend upon a death, which will give them timely warning to make their peace with God; and lastly, they depend upon a death-bed repentance, which no man can assure them will be accepted of God.

Now, would any man in his senses trust his soul to such uncertainties? Would any man put off his repentance from time to time, who finds by experience, that the longer he defers it, the more unwilling he is still to set about it? Would any man, who believes the Gospel, and that repentance and amendment of life are necessary to salvation, make these the *least*, and the *last* of his thoughts and business?

SERM. LXIV.

And now, good Christians, I have told you what are the things which generally hinder our conversion: we are called upon by the Church, and by Jesus Christ, to repent, and to turn unto God; and we find in ourselves no inclination to do so. I have shewed you the causes of this indifference, that you may lay aside every weight, every thing, that may hinder you from beginning a new life. I have shewed you, that if Christians live in sins unrepented of, it is either because they have little or no regard for their souls; or they fancy their condition is better than really it is, because of some outward duties of religion which they perform; or they are frightened by the difficulties of a Christian life; or lastly, they resolve to repent when they have a more convenient season.

I might use a great many words to persuade you, that none of these things ought to hinder your conversion; but I need not. Your own reason and consciences will tell you, that we ought to be more concerned for what will become of us when we die, than for any thing that can befall us in this world; that nothing but holiness and righteousness, or a life agreeable to the laws of God, can make us fit for heaven; that no difficulties ought to affright us where Almighty God promises to assist us; and lastly, that if we repent not now, it is very uncertain whether or not we shall ever repent.

A Christian, who is convinced of the truth of these things, will not, cannot be at rest, till he has removed whatever may hinder his conversion. He will fall upon his knees, and beg of God to give him all the graces preparatory to a true repentance; which are, a serious concern for our souls, an humble opinion of ourselves; an entire confidence in God's power and goodness to help such as flee to Him for succour; and lastly, a firm resolution to do the work in its season which God has appointed us; that is, to turn unto God, and do [John 9. 4.] works meet for repentance, "before the night cometh when no man can work."

May the good Lord give unto us all these holy dispositions, that, by a true and timely repentance, we may make our peace with God, and be made by Him eternally happy, through Jesus Christ our Lord.

SERMON LXV.

PREACHED ON PALM SUNDAY.

THE SUFFERINGS AND DEATH OF CHRIST PRACTICALLY EXPLAINED AND APPLIED.

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1 Cor. ii. 2.

I determined not to know any thing among you, save Jesus Christ, and Him crucified.

See Luke 24. 46; Acts 17. 3; Rom. 4. 25; 6. 3, 5; 1 Cor. 1. 23; 15. 3; 2 Cor. 5. 15; Gal. 6. 14; Phil. 3. 10; 1 Pet. 1. 3, 4.

This was the foundation of all St. Paul's sermons, as it ought to be of ours: this being the power of God, and the wisdom of God, to regain the world out of the hands of Satan, and to save souls from eternal ruin.

Every one of the apostles and evangelists, who have written our Lord's life, have given us a very particular account of the manner of His *evil treatment*, His *sufferings*, and of His *death*. Now, these are all read in the daily service of this week, as full of instructions, and proper to prepare us for the blessed Sacrament appointed to be administered on Sunday next. Whereby we learn what our Lord suffered, in order to obtain our pardon, and to restore us to the mercy and favour of our offended God.

When you hear the Gospels read,—how our blessed Lord was betrayed, and used, and crucified, by the merciless Jews,—you are naturally led to wonder and blame that people's *malice*, their *wickedness*, and *injustice*.

For example:

When we are informed, that one of His disciples, who had been with Him for so long a time, had seen His miracles, and heard His blessed discourses, could be tempted to betray Him for any consideration whatever; that so great a number of men of learning, and supposed piety, should meet and con-

SERM. LXV.

trive how to take away the life of an innocent person, to encourage false witnesses, and to persuade the people to pray for the life of a murderer, instead of the life of one who had done so much good among them: then we are led to blame His judge, who had declared over and over again, that he found no fault in Him, and yet at last condemned Him: and lastly, we are amazed that any people could be so cruelly barbarous, as to mock a man, and use him so spitefully, who had never done them harm, and at a time when his life was at stake, or when he was suffering a most painful death.

These, I say, are the thoughts which are most in our minds when we read the mournful account of our Saviour's sufferings.

After all,

This was not the great design of leaving these things upon record; but to let us see what treatment our sins deserve; how abominable sin is in the sight of an holy and just God, who suffered His own Son to be thus treated, when He had put Himself in the place of sinners, in order to procure their pardon; and lastly, to convince sinners what *they must* expect whose sins are not pardoned by the merits and sufferings of Jesus Christ.

These, I say, and such thoughts as these, should be in our minds when we read or hear the circumstances of our Saviour's sufferings; which I am now going to set before you, for your edification.

The leading men of the Jews, having been often reproved by our Lord for their errors, their pride, their hypocrisy, and other vices, were resolved to take the first fair opportunity to put Him to death. Now Satan very soon offered them this opportunity; for Judas, having been reproved by our Lord for his covetousness, and for envying the loss, as he thought it, of some valuable ointment which a pious woman had poured on our Saviour's head and feet, Satan put it into his heart to betray his Master to His enemies, for which he received a sum of money.

See what covetousness and resentment will lead men to, even to the greatest sin that ever was committed by man!

Our blessed Lord foresaw all this, and retired with His disciples into a garden, to prepare Himself for that usage and

death which He saw approaching. In this place His mind was struck with something so terrible, that He declared that His soul was sore troubled, even to death. What it was that amazed Him, and made Him so exceeding sorrowful, no mortal man can tell. We can only be sure that it was something dreadful beyond imagination, since it forced Him to sweat great drops of blood falling to the ground.

In this distress and agony our Lord has taught us how to behave under the greatest afflictions; and especially when our death approaches: to beg of God to deliver us from all our spiritual enemies, to send His angels to strengthen us, and at the same time to submit ourselves entirely to God's will and disposal in the very words of Jesus Christ, *not my will, but Thine be done.* [Luke 22. 42.]

And now, our Lord, knowing that it was God's will that He should die, went to meet those that came to take Him. Judas was their leader, who, that they might not mistake their man in the dark, went to Jesus, and, as he had promised them, kissed Him. This our Lord suffered with patience; which will be an everlasting reproach and condemnation to such as pretend to be His followers, and yet will not bear the sight of one that hath offended them.

While the rest were going to seize Him, Peter drew his sword to defend his Lord and Master from the rude multitude; which his Lord would not suffer, telling him, that if he had a mind to escape their hands, God, upon His prayer, could send Him twelve legions of angels, instead of His twelve disciples, to rescue Him out of their hands.

He is now led as a sheep to the slaughter. Let us follow Him in our minds and spirits, and we shall see what treatment (as we are sinners) every soul of us deserves.

And first, they bind Him as a malefactor, then lead Him to the high-priest's palace, where, even before He is tried, He suffers all the scorn, and contempt, and ill usage, that a rude and barbarous people could put upon Him. To add to His trouble, *now*, all His disciples had forsaken Him for fear of the like evil usage.

All the priests and rulers being met in council, and having sought for false witnesses, such as might take away His life, they set Him before them; and the witnesses not agreeing

SERM. LXV.

together, at last the high-priest adjured Him, by the living God, to say whether He was the MESSIAH, *the Son of the most High God?* Jesus could not deny it, though His life was at stake, but said, I AM. The high-priest then declared that He had spoken blasphemy; and they all agreed that He was guilty of death. After this, shall we, any of us, complain of injustice, when the innocence of Christ could not escape?

It was now they used our Lord after a manner the most outrageous. They spit in His face, they smote Him, they blindfolded Him, and bade Him prophesy who smote Him;—all which He bore with the greatest meekness and patience, because He was in the place of sinners, who really deserve such treatment: and yet sinners themselves, even they that pretend to be His followers, think they ought never to forgive far less injuries than these.

After this, we have a sad instance of human frailty when left to itself: St. Peter had declared, over and over again, that *he would lay down his life for his Master;* but when he saw his Master in this danger, and was charged with being one of His disciples, he denied it after a manner the most weak and scandalous. This ought to be a warning to the best of us, not to trust in ourselves, without the grace and help of God, which we ought never to forget to pray for.

Our Lord indeed had pity on him, otherwise he might have gone the length of Judas' sin; the cock had spoken to his outward ears without any effect, till Jesus, with a most gracious and powerful look, touched his heart with a true sense of his crime, and melted it into tears of repentance. May the same eye of mercy look upon us whenever we shall do amiss, that we may be sensible of our fault, and return out of the way of ruin!

And now the whole multitude arose, and led Him to Pilate; and there they accused our Lord of treason, sedition, and blasphemy. Pilate found all this to be the mere effect of *malice* and *envy*, and declared, over and over again, *that he found no fault in Him.* But that would not satisfy the Jews. Pilate, still unwilling to condemn an innocent man against his conscience, orders our Lord to be scourged till He was covered with blood, hoping this would move their compassion, and that He would not deserve, nor they desire,

a greater punishment. But all this would not do with people who were under the power of Satan. *Behold,* saith he, *the man!* Is there any fear that He can hurt you?

The Jews indeed were not moved with this sad sight; but every Christian ought to be moved with it, and to beg of God to look upon His Son thus used, and to pardon our offences, which were indeed the cause of all the torments He endured, and which the best of us have deserved.

The chief-priest and elders still persisted in their demand to have Him crucified, and told the judge, he was not the emperor's friend, if he released the prisoner. This awakened his fears; and having washed his hands, and declared, that he was innocent of the blood of that just person, he condemned Him to be crucified, against all *justice,* against all *law,* and against his *conscience.* When he declared himself innocent of Christ's blood, the Jews cried out, "His blood be upon us and our children;" and so it is to this day. For though it was for our sins His blood was shed, yet their crime was exceeding great, as appeared by the punishment it brought upon them, in the destruction of *their temple, their city, their nation,* and *themselves.* [Matt. 27. 25.]

In this unhappy people, let us see the sad effects of malice and envy, and the power of the devil over such as give way to these vices. They had long expected the Messiah as the great blessing promised by God unto their nation, and when He came they murdered Him. They abhorred the government of the Romans, and now declare that they would have *no king but Cæsar.*

When Judas saw what his wickedness ended in, he repented of what he had done, went to those that had hired him, flung down his wages, and confessed his crime. Pray take notice of their answer: "What is that to us? See thou to that." This, God knows, is too often the case of others, who, after they have drawn men into sin, seldom or never trouble themselves with what must follow, or how to recover them out of it. [Matt. 27. 4.]

And now our Lord, the same day He was condemned, was carried out to be crucified; though, by the Tiberian law, there ought to have been ten days betwixt the sentence and execution.

SERM. LXV.

The cross, as the manner was, was put upon Him to bear it; but fainting under the burden, it was laid upon another to bear it after Him. And while they that followed Him lamented His sad fate, He assured them that they had more need to weep for themselves and their children, for the miseries that were coming upon them: for *if*, saith He, *the green tree, which is not fit to burn, be thus dealt with, what will become of the dry?* that is, if innocent men be thus dealt with, what will be the punishment of the wicked?

[Luke 23. 31.]

And now our Lord is nailed to the cross, to suffer the most lingering and painful death; and placed betwixt two thieves, to make Him still more contemptible. These people not knowing, which they should have done, that the Messiah, according to their own Scriptures, was to be *numbered with the transgressors*.

Isa. 53. 12.

Let us now, for a few minutes, suppose ourselves at the foot of the cross, and Jesus Christ speaking to us after this manner: 'It is for you, and on your account, that I undergo these pains and these indignities; to make an atonement for your sins; to obtain your pardon, that you may not suffer eternal torments; and that, being again reconciled to God, and restored to His favour, you may for ever enjoy that happiness for which you were at first created.'

Let us consider what ought to be the answer of every Christian that has any sense of gratitude and concern for his soul: 'I abhor that sin for which you are so kind and merciful as to die. I am astonished at the love of God, who did not overlook lost mankind, (for ever blessed be His holy name!) but sent *you* His only Son, to redeem us, to redeem and save us from ruin, even when we were your Father's enemies. I shall be the most ungrateful creature, if I do not abhor and forsake those sins, which could not be forgiven without so great a sacrifice. And the sacrifice being so infinitely great, I will depend upon it for the pardon of all my sins, though never so many and great.'

Such as these should be the thought and purposes of every Christian, when he goes to the Lord's Table, to call to mind what Jesus Christ has done and suffered for us.

But let us return again to the cross; where we shall find a superscription written in *Greek*, in *Hebrew*, and in *Latin*,

THIS IS THE KING OF THE JEWS; that all the world, being concerned in His death, might read and see who He was, how wrongfully He suffered; might enquire into the cause of His sufferings, that they might look upon Him in spirit, and be healed and freed from death, as the Israelites were by looking upon the brazen serpent in the wilderness: so the providence of God ordered it. [Luke 23. 38.]

And now, to add to His afflictions, the rulers and chief priests mocked and reviled Him in these words: "He trusted in God; let Him deliver Him now, if He will have Him; for He said He was the Son of God." This was a judicial blindness indeed; that they should use the very words that the Spirit of God had, in their own Scriptures, foretold would be said to Him whose hands and feet should be pierced. Amazing blindness! that they could not see, that they themselves were fulfilling that prophecy of the Messiah. Ps. 22. 8,16.

Others railed upon Him, and said, "He saved others, Himself He cannot save;" "Let Him come down from the cross, and we will believe Him to be the King of the Jews." [Matt. 27. 42.]

What blind and ignorant creatures we are when left to ourselves! These people did not consider, *that faith is the gift of God,* without which all the miracles in the world will not make us believe what we have no mind to believe.

To add still to His affliction, the very malefactors, one of them at least, reviled Him; the other, his heart being touched by the all-powerful Spirit of Christ, acknowledged his sins, and had the comfortable assurance of a pardon.

By these two instances we may receive instruction; by one of them, to be careful and afraid to continue in sin till we come to die, lest we provoke God to leave us to ourselves, for then we shall never repent, never be saved; the other may preserve the greatest sinners from utter despair, for we do not know how far God's mercy may extend.

And indeed God makes use of a thousand ways and means to awaken and convert such sinners as have not hardened their hearts against all conviction; for at this time a dreadful darkness on a sudden overspread the sky; an earthquake rent the very rocks of the place, and the great vail of their temple was torn from top to bottom.

Many, indeed, were affected with these wonderful things,

SERM. LXV.

and smote their breasts, expecting some severe judgments for the injustice done to a righteous man: even the centurion, an heathen, was one who gave glory to God on this occasion: others were hardened. So unsearchable are the judgments of God!

Our Lord, in the midst of His torments, shewed His infinite love for sinners, and prayed for them, "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do." And for our comfort, we are sure, that even now He pleads in heaven for every poor sinner, who, for His sake, begs of God for pardon, and for grace to lead a godly life.

[Luke 23. 34.]

The exquisite pains our Lord had so long endured forced Him at last to cry out, My God, My God, why hast Thou forsaken Me? Which should convince all sinners, all mankind, in whose place He then was, *that they deserve to be forsaken of God;* and that they will be forsaken, and for ever lost, if they do not close with this mercy of Christ, in suffering for all those who will repent and turn to God, and, through faith in His blood, beg of God the pardon of their sins, and live like people whom Jesus Christ has redeemed from eternal death and misery.

And now, our Saviour said aloud, it is finished; that is, I have now undergone and performed all that I was to do, in order to atone for the sins of the world; and so gave up the ghost.

You have now, Christians, seen the manner of our Saviour's sufferings. This will be of very little service to us, if we do not know and lay to heart the reasons of His death and sufferings; as also, what will be required *on our part* to make them the greatest blessing to us that God can give to His sinful creatures.

Now, it concerns every soul of us, more than our lives are worth, to know the reasons of these sufferings of Christ which we have been setting before you.

It would be but small comfort for a sinner to know and believe in a God infinitely holy, just, and powerful, and who hates all iniquity, did we not know He is to be appeased when offended.

Now, this is the case of every man living, without the knowledge of Jesus Christ, and what He has done for us.

And, indeed, no thoughtful man can have any true peace in his soul, till he has, by a true knowledge and faith in the blood of Jesus Christ, secured, in some good measure, his peace with God. He will then, and not till then, see the blessing of a Redeemer, who can make his peace with God; who has obtained his pardon for what is past, and can enable him to escape for the time to come.

Now this, Jesus Christ has done and obtained for us by His sufferings and death. He hath reconciled us to God His Father; He hath obtained for us, that a sincere repentance shall be accepted instead of a perfect obedience; and that our sincere endeavour to please God shall be accepted, and even rewarded. At the same time He hath made known to us this awakening truth: that if we sin wilfully, when we know this, and do not repent, and bring forth fruits meet for repentance, we shall perish, and that for ever.

It is but too plain, by the practice of Christians, such as they are, that they do not look upon sin as so hateful to God, and dangerous to themselves, as it really is, and therefore they sin without fear; whereas sin ought to be dreaded more than death, because it leads to a second death, even to death eternal.

And every man, who will lay any thing seriously to heart, will be convinced of this, when he remembers how severely the first sins that ever were committed by angels or men were punished by an offended God; the one, that of angels, with no less a loss than the loss of heaven; and the other, the sin of Adam, with the loss of paradise.

But above all, the sufferings of Jesus Christ discover to us the dreadful nature of sin, and that God cannot but be exceedingly offended with it, since His justice required such an atonement. That therefore Christians, above all men, ought to hate it, and fear every degree of it, as they hope for any benefit from the sufferings of Christ, the great design of which was to redeem us: as how? Why, the Apostle will shew you: by redeeming us from sin, and by purifying to Himself a peculiar people, a generation of men freed from the pollutions of this wicked world, and zealous of good works.

Now, if, through our own fault, the death of Christ has

SERM. LXV.

not this effect upon us, we are still under the power of Satan, under the bondage of sin, and utterly incapable of eternal life and happiness.

In the next place, let us remember, that the sacrifice that was offered for us was the Lamb, the Son of God, which taketh away the sins of the world. This is such an assurance to all those who close with this mercy, that God will be reconciled to them, that an angel from heaven, sent to every one of us, could not give us a greater assurance or comfort, that our sins upon our true repentance will be forgiven, and our pardon sealed in heaven.

Let us therefore, whenever the memorial of the death of Christ is celebrated in the Lord's Supper; let us be careful, by faith, to apply it to ourselves, and be qualified to do so by a due preparation, each of us saying in his heart, 'This body and blood were given and shed for me. The minister of God assures me of it, and I do faithfully trust in it.'

It was for this reason that Jesus Christ ordained that holy Sacrament, that we might be often obliged to remember His love for us; His bitter sufferings; the occasion of His death; the misery we have thereby escaped, if it be not our own fault, and the happiness He has obtained for us; that we may be obliged, by all the motives of interest and gratitude, to love Him with all our heart and soul, and to put our whole trust in His mercy.

Then will our own death, whenever it shall happen, be a blessing to us, and better than the day of our birth, when nothing in this world can be a comfort to us, but a firm faith in Jesus Christ, and what He has done and suffered for our salvation.

We shall then see the importance of a true faith, and set a true value upon the blood of Christ, when every thing else will yield us no substantial comfort; when we can say with the Apostle, *I know in whom I have believed*, even in the Son of God, who came to seek and to save lost sinners, and who gave His life to redeem them from the second death.

[2 Tim. 1. 12.]

In this faith, and with these hopes, every good Christian will cheerfully submit to death in union with that of Jesus Christ, whose dying words, God grant that I myself, and every soul here present, may so live, as to have reason to

make use of; INTO THY HANDS I COMMEND MY SPIRIT; for Thou hast redeemed me, O Lord, Thou God of truth! [Luke 23. 46.]

But then let us ever remember, that whoever would thus resign his life, who hopes to die in *peace*, and rest in *hope*, and rise in *glory*, must endeavour through His grace to follow His blessed steps, take up His cross, and follow His example, or he will be dreadfully disappointed.

And now, Christians, you see the wisdom of that Church of which you are all members, in giving us an occasion of so often laying before God the great passages of *His* Son and *our* blessed Saviour's life and death, to plead our pardon and deliverance from eternal death,—by His fasting and temptation; by His agony and bloody sweat; by His cross and passion; by His precious death and burial;—the great causes of our redemption from eternal death.

To conclude: we have the Son of God for our Redeemer, for our example, for our King to protect us, for our Prophet to teach us the way of salvation, for our Priest to intercede with God for us: what can we desire more?—Yes, O Jesus, this one thing we desire and beg, that we may have the grace which Thou alone canst obtain for us, that we may have the grace to lay these things to heart, and that our lives may be answerable to what we profess to believe, that we may love and bless Thee to all eternity. *Amen. Amen.*

SERMON LXVI.

THE SUFFERINGS AND DEATH OF CHRIST NECESSARY FOR THE SALVATION OF THE WORLD.

LUKE xxiv. 46.

Thus it is written, and thus it behoved Christ to suffer, and to rise from the dead the third day.

EVERY Christian, that is not well instructed in the principles of Christianity, cannot choose but wonder why God should suffer His own beloved Son to be so barbarously used, to be exposed to so much *shame*, and *scorn*, and *pain*, and to the greatest *abuses*, and after all, to a most *cruel death*; and that this His Son would suffer all this, when it was in His power to have hindered it; for, as He Himself declares, He could have had twelve legions of angels, instead of twelve disciples, to have taken Him out of the hands of His murderers, if He had pleased.

This must needs be a wonder to all such as know not the reason of all this; as we have reason to fear *too many do not*. But Christ Himself assures us, in the words of the text, that it was *requisite*, that it was *necessary*, He should do so; for that God had so decreed it; that His justice required it; for that the whole race of men would be lost for ever, if He did not satisfy the justice of God for their sins, and restore them to His favour, by suffering what they had deserved to suffer for their manifold transgressions. For this reason *it behoved Him to suffer*; forasmuch as He had put Himself in the place and stead of sinners, and had taken upon Himself to answer for *their* offences, and to satisfy the justice of His offended Father.

Now, the knowledge of this great mystery being the very foundation of the Christian religion, and of all our hopes of salvation, I will endeavour, through the assistance of God's Holy Spirit, to explain it to the very meanest capacity (of

every one that understands me); and I hope you will attend to what I am going to say, with a seriousness which such a subject certainly requires.

In the first place, we none of us need to be convinced, that *we*, and all mankind, are sinners; that is, there is not one of us who have not broken the commands of God, which must be very displeasing to a most *holy*, *good*, and *just* Being. And every considering person cannot but be afraid for himself, who knows, and is assured, that this holy and just Being has declared, that He *must* and *will* punish sinners, as they shall deserve.

What must a sinner do in this case? What of all things in this world would a sinner, whose conscience is awake, most earnestly wish for? I will take upon me to tell you what such a person would above all things desire. He would desire, that God, whom he had so greatly offended, and who had threatened to punish offenders, would pardon the many offences that he had been guilty of; and in the next place, that God would enable him, for the time to come, so to live as that he might not offend Him any more.

This, indeed, is not what every sinner desires; (would to God it were!) but this is what every thoughtful person, whose conscience is truly awakened by the fear of God's judgments against sinners, cannot but wish for above all things in this world, *that God would forgive him his past offences;* and *enable him not to offend Him for the time to come.*

Now, these two most invaluable favours, Jesus Christ has purchased for us by His death. He laid down His life to obtain our pardon; and He has sent down His all-powerful Spirit to assist us to mend our corrupt nature.

How our nature came to be so corrupt, we have an account in the third chapter of Genesis; how the first parents of mankind rebelled against their Maker's command; how they were punished for their disobedience; how the merciful God accepted of His Son's intercession that so great a part of His creation might not be for ever lost; and, lastly, how these parents of mankind left a generation behind them like themselves, corrupt, and prone to evil.

This was the case of man, when the Son of God took our

SERM. XLVI.

nature upon Him, in order to redeem mankind at the price of His own blood. For this He had engaged to do: to take the nature of men upon Him, that as a man He might make satisfaction to God for the offences of sinful men, and suffer every thing that they had deserved to suffer, even death itself; and by this most kind, most merciful undertaking, we, and all mankind, are restored to the favour of God, and have a right given us to eternal life and happiness, if we are not wanting to ourselves.

And now, Christians, you see why God would suffer His own Son to be put to death by wicked men; and why His Son would choose to be so punished. It was because He had undertaken the cause of sinners, and had put Himself in their room, and place, and stead; and therefore was in justice bound to suffer what they as sinners had deserved, and were obliged in justice to undergo, in order to satisfy the justice of His offended Father, who therefore suffered His Son to be so treated and put to death.

This you will find was manifested in all our Saviour's whole life and sufferings: for He took upon Himself the condition of a servant; He was born of a poor virgin; He wanted at His birth the very necessaries of poverty; He was forced to flee for His life into Egypt as soon almost as born. When He was grown up, and appeared in the world, He was treated with the most opprobrious language, and had not where to lay His head. And all this He was to undergo, not only to convince mankind what they as sinners do deserve, but also to satisfy the justice of God.

But this will appear still more plain, when we consider the last part of His life. And here I shall have a very good occasion to explain to you several passages of the Gospels relating to our Saviour: His being *betrayed, tried, condemned,* and *crucified;* which will be well worth your knowing and remembering; and by which you will be convinced, that the sufferings of Christ were all foreknown and determined by God.

For example: Jesus Christ having, for our sakes, taken upon Him the form (the condition) of a servant, He was to be treated as such; and therefore Judas and the Jews could agree upon no other sum for betraying and selling

his Master, but thirty pieces of silver, which was just the price of a servant, as we find in the law of Moses. [Exod. 21. 32.]

And here one cannot pass by observing, how little those that tempt others to wickedness are concerned for what follows. Judas, his eyes being opened, was overwhelmed with horror at what he had done, and flung back the money they had given him, declaring that he had betrayed the innocent blood. This mournful confession, and sad affliction, never moved them. All they answered was,—"What is that to us? See *thou* to that." [Matt. 27. 4.]

Little do people fear the sin of *covetousness;* and yet here we find it the occasion of one of the greatest crimes that ever was committed; so true it is, THAT THE LOVE OF MONEY IS THE ROOT OF ALL EVIL. [1 Tim. 6. 10.]

To proceed: when Judas betrayed Him, Jesus Christ did not so much as upbraid him; when false witnesses were set up to take away His life, He did not so much as once complain of the injustice; for He had put Himself in the place of guilty sinners, and therefore took patiently the worst of usage.

Of this patience we have a memorable instance in a circumstance which attended His examination by the chief priest; for when one smote Him on the face, and rebuked Him, He answered with the utmost mildness, "If I have done evil, bear witness of the evil; but if well, why smitest thou Me?" How different was this from what St. Paul answered, when the high-priest commanded Him to be smitten on the face; "God shall smite thee, thou whited wall! For sittest thou to judge me after the law, and commandest me to be smitten contrary to the law." [John 18. 23.] [Acts 23. 3.]

Upon Pilate's declaring, over and over again, that he found no fault in Christ: that He had done nothing worthy of death; and for his part he would wash his hands, that he might be clear of the blood of so just a man; the Jews, with one voice, cried out, "His blood be upon us and upon our children;"—and so it is to this day. They are a people dispersed over the whole world, and treated with contempt wherever they go. [Matt. 27. 25.]

But His righteous blood was required of them in a most signal and dreadful manner, within forty years after they so

SERM. LXVI.

unjustly crucified the Son of God; and at the very time of the Passover, when their city was besieged, and when no less than eleven hundred thousand were slain at one time. And Pilate, the unrighteous judge, who had both acquitted and condemned the Lord Christ, by a righteous judgment of God was soon after called from his government and banished, and within four or five years hanged himself out of despair.

But even after our Lord was condemned, He was used worse than the most notorious criminals are ever used, or suffered to be treated. They spit in His face, and buffeted Him; they crowned Him with a crown of thorns, and so led Him out to crucify Him. Why was all this suffered by God His Father? Was it not to shew mankind, that as sinners, nobody can use us worse than we deserve; and that *He*, having put Himself in the place of sinful men, must of necessity suffer after this manner? For so the Prophet Isaiah had foretold, no less than seven hundred years before, that
chap. 53. the Messiah should be so used, in these words, "He was" (that is, *He was to be*) "despised, and rejected of men. He was oppressed, and He was afflicted, yet He opened not His mouth. But He was wounded for our transgressions, and with His stripes we are healed. For the Lord laid on Him the iniquities of us all." Thus it was written, and thus it behoved Christ to suffer.

And now He was led out to be crucified. And here pray let us observe the providence of God. He was carried to be crucified to a mountain called *Calvary*, that is, a place of a skull, from an old tradition that Adam was there buried. But whether that was so or not, this we are sure of, that this was the very mountain Moriah, where Abraham was commanded to sacrifice his only, his beloved son; who was to be a type or figure of Jesus Christ. And the prophet having foretold
Isa. 53. that the Messiah was to be numbered with the transgressors, the Jews, not knowing what they did, fulfilled that prophecy, and crucified Him between two thieves. So wonderfully surprising are all the ways of God, and ordered for the confirmation of our faith and trust in Jesus Christ!

He is now upon the cross, His hands and His feet nailed to it. One would think that their envy and malice was now satisfied: but there were other prophecies to be fulfilled.

The Prophet David had said in the person of the Messiah, "They pierced my hands and my feet;" and, that He who was to be so used, "should be laughed to scorn in the midst of His sufferings;" that they should say in scorn, "He trusted in the Lord that He would deliver Him; let Him deliver Him, seeing He delighted in Him." Let us observe how this prophecy was most exactly fulfilled: the chief priests and rulers mocked Him and said, "He saved others, Himself He cannot save. If He be the Son of God, let Him deliver Him," &c. What use are we to make of this strange blindness of this people? Why, we may see, in the perverse blindness of the Jews, what we ourselves should be, and what we should do, if we, for our sins, were forsaken of God, and left to ourselves.

Ps. 22.

[Matt. 27. 41, &c.]

The sufferings of Christ were now so extremely great, that He was forced to cry out, "My God, My God, why hast Thou forsaken Me!" These are the very words of the twenty-second Psalm, which the Prophet David foreshewed would be made use of by Him who was thus to suffer, that we may see that every sinner, in whose place Christ then was, does deserve to be forsaken of God, and would be so forsaken, if Christ had not thus suffered for him.

When God appointed the Passover, in order to keep up the remembrance of this people's deliverance out of the bondage of Egypt, which was also to be a type or figure of a greater deliverance by Jesus Christ, He ordered, *that a bone of the Lamb that was sacrificed should not be broken.*

[Exod. 12. 46.]

Observe now the wonderful order of Providence: there was a great man of the Jews, who had begged of Pilate the body of Christ. Pilate marvelled, if He were already dead; which he would not have done, had he known what a dreadful night He had had in His agony in the garden, when He sweat great drops of blood, and after this was kept the whole night without sleep, hurried through the streets, first to one high-priest's house, then to another, then to Pilate, then to Herod, then to Pilate again; and, after all this, out of the city to the place where He was crucified, bearing His cross till He could no longer stand under it. But when Pilate had enquired of the centurion, he gave him leave to take the body.

SERM. LXVI. [John 19. 33, &c.]

But before the bodies were taken down, the soldiers brake the legs of the two thieves; and why not the legs of Christ? They knew nothing of the Passover, and yet God so ordered it, that they broke not His legs;—but one of them, to make sure work, ran a lance into His heart, and fulfilled another Zech.12.10. prophecy of the Messiah, that "they should look on Him whom they had pierced."

And now He is buried. And, because He had openly declared, that they should kill Him, and that after three days He would rise again from the dead, the Jews took all imaginable care to secure the body till after the third day; they procured a guard of soldiers to watch the sepulchre, and sealed the stone that covered the door of the tomb. And such was the order of Providence, that not one of the Apostles were concerned in His burial. Thus God, in a manner we do not always take notice of, confirms our faith.

But after all the care of the Jews, our blessed Lord did rise again the third day, and conversed with His disciples, with five hundred at one time; and after He had instructed them in the things concerning His Church, He ascended before their eyes into heaven, there to appear before God, for all such as, through faith in His blood, go unto God for any blessings they stand in need of.

And now, good Christians, do not imagine that I have made these observations upon our Saviour's death and resurrection, only to please your curiosity. Very far from it: but it was, that you might be convinced of these truths: forasmuch as the knowledge and firm belief of these truths is the only foundation of our hope of pardon and peace with God. This being the spring and fountain of all the blessings which we either enjoy now, or hope for hereafter. Without this God would never accept of the repentance of any sinner. IT IS JESUS CHRIST (as the Apostle assures us, Col. i. 20) THAT HAS MADE OUR PEACE WITH GOD, BY THE BLOOD OF HIS CROSS.

So that it would be the greatest boldness in any man to presume to ask any favour of God, without asking it for Christ's sake, who by His death has obtained this mighty blessing for His sinful creatures, that God, for His sake, will hear, and receive, and grant our petitions. This is the

only refuge of an awakened conscience,—of a sinner who has nothing else to depend on for pardon, but the sacrifice of the death of Christ,—nor any hopes of amendment but by the assistance of that Holy Spirit which Jesus Christ has obtained for us, by His sufferings and resurrection.

Now, therefore, let us consider, what are the uses Christians ought to make of this knowledge of the death of Christ, and of His resurrection.

And in the first place, let us be assured, that we cannot truly understand, how very much God is displeased with sin and sinners, but only by looking upon Jesus Christ upon the cross; when we see that God would not spare His own Son, when He had put Himself into the room and place of sinners, but made Him to suffer what they by their sins had deserved to suffer.

That sin deserves death, this we must be assured of, because the righteous Judge of all the earth pronounced that sentence upon our first parents, in case they transgressed the law He had given them. And they had most surely died the moment they sinned, but that the Son of God undertook to satisfy His Father's justice, by undergoing the punishment which they had deserved. And it was on that account their lives were continued, and a time of trial granted them, to see what use they would make of this favour.

In the next place, we learn, by the sufferings of Christ, the exceeding love of God for us His poor creatures; that He would suffer His own Son to take our nature upon Him, and to be so sadly used, rather than so great a part of His creation should be utterly lost and ruined.

"God so loved the world, that He gave His only-begotten Son, to the end that all that believe in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life." This being the greatest token of the love of God should lead us to love God with all our soul, and mind, and strength. [John 3. 16.]

And the infinite obligations which we Christians have to love Jesus Christ for what He suffered for us, obliged St. Paul to give this standing rule to the Church: "If any man love not the Lord Jesus Christ, let him be Anathema Maranatha;" that is, leave him to the judgment of God, and do not own him for a Christian. [1 Cor. 16. 22.]

SERM. LXVI.

Now let us consider the end of all this, and why our knowledge and belief of Christ's death is so much pressed upon us by the Holy Spirit of God. Is it not because this is the very foundation of *that holiness, without which no man must ever see the Lord in peace?*

[Heb. 12. 14.]

[2 Cor. 5. 15.]

"Jesus Christ died for all, that they who live should not live unto themselves, but unto Him who died for them, and rose again." Nothing being more just and reasonable, than that we should consecrate our lives to Him, which He has redeemed from the power of the devil, and saved us from death eternal.

The end of Christ's suffering was to save us from our sins, that He might "purify unto Himself a people zealous of good works." "If a man love Me," saith Christ,—if he values Me, and what I have done for him,—"he will keep My commandments." And for our souls' and for God's sake, let us often remember, that it is utterly impossible that any man should be happy without being restored, by an holy life, to the image of God: that alone can make us meet to be partakers of the inheritance of the saints in heaven.

[Tit. 2. 14.] [John 14. 15, 23.]

And I would to God that every Christian, who hears (and understands) me, would make this (as I bless God I do) one part of his daily prayers,—that God would restore us to His image, and that the image of Satan may be destroyed in us. Jesus Christ, who has declared, that whatsoever we ask the Father in His name, He will grant it us, will certainly grant *this,* if we ask in faith,—to be restored to the image of God, in which our first parents were created, and before they fell into sin.

Now, Christians, you see the true reason why Jesus Christ appointed the holy Sacrament of the Lord's Supper. It was, that we might keep up the remembrance of His death; that we might never forget His love and mercy in dying for us; that, in a grateful remembrance of what He has done and suffered for us, we might dedicate (devote) ourselves, our spirits, souls, and bodies, to His service,—to the service of our Creator; and that by so doing, we might by Him be made happy for ever and ever.

And in truth, every Christian, who receives this holy Sacrament as he ought to do, does it in token that he pur-

poses, through the grace of God, to continue Christ's faithful servant unto his life's end; which if he doth, the divine justice cannot punish him for his former sins that he has repented of, no more than if he had never sinned or done amiss. So very great is the mercy obtained for us by Jesus Christ!

It was not for nothing that Christ, when He appointed this Sacrament, commanded, Do THIS IN REMEMBRANCE OF ME; that is, of the holy example that I have set you; of the holy doctrine I have taught you; of the sorrows and bitter death I have suffered for you. A sacrifice of love that passeth all expressions and acknowledgments on our part. All that we can do or promise is this: that we will, by the grace of God, sin wilfully no more, *nor crucify to ourselves the Son of God afresh, by putting Him to an open shame.* [Heb. 6. 6.]

And, O God! grant that this may be the resolution of every one here present, when he goes to the Lord's Table,—to sin no more, lest a worse thing follow, than what has yet happened to any of us.

As to the RESURRECTION OF JESUS CHRIST mentioned in the text, it is a blessing for which we ought to be exceedingly thankful; forasmuch as by this, God has given us all the assurance that our hearts can wish, *that He is reconciled to us by the death of His Son,* since He hath raised Him from the dead; and that whatever He hath *said,* or *taught,* or *done,* was agreeable to His divine will, and ought to be believed, and attended to, and followed, as the will of God, at the peril of our souls.

Let us therefore conclude, and we cannot do it better than in the words of St. Peter, "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who, according to His abundant mercy, hath begotten us again unto a lively hope by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, to an inheritance incorruptible and undefiled, and which fadeth not away, reserved in heaven for us." 1 Epist. 1. 3, 4.

And indeed a true Christian lives on earth in this hope of an inheritance in heaven.

This life is short; the inheritances of this world are uncertain, its blessings are uncertain, and may, and often are, taken from us while we live; and when we die, part with them

SERM. LXVI.

we must: but the goodness of God, and His blessings, and inheritance, endure for ever.

The good Lord grant that we may think much of these things, and that our conversation may be in heaven, where our Lord Jesus Christ sitteth at the right hand of God, our mediator and advocate.

To Whom, with the Father and the Holy Ghost, be all honour and glory, thanksgiving and praise, for ever.

SERMON LXVII.

THE SIN OF JUDAS PRACTICALLY EXPLAINED AND APPLIED.

LUKE xxii. 21.

Behold, the hand of him that betrayeth me is with me on the table.

See Ps. 41. 9; Jer. 7. 9; Matt. 26. 23; Mark 14. 18; Luke 22. 48; 1 Tim. 6. 1; Tit. 1. 16.

BOTH Judas, and his crime, are spoken of by Christians with the greatest abhorrence; and we cannot think of his punishment without trembling. Well:—let us all take care then not to imitate him in his sin, that we may escape *his* punishment. Why; is there any need of such a caution? Truly, our Church seems to think so, when she exhorts all such as intend to come to the Lord's Table to repent themselves truly of all their sins, before they presume to eat of that bread, or drink of that cup; lest, after the taking of that holy Sacrament, the devil enter into them, as he entered into Judas, and fill them full of all iniquity, and bring them to destruction both of soul and body.

And indeed, it is a thing too plain to be concealed, that too many, who come to our Lord's Table, do betray their Saviour and His religion, and expose them both to shame and contempt. I cannot therefore, when I read this sad account of Judas, and the warning which the Church gives us upon it, I cannot but be concerned, both for myself and you that hear me, lest we should (as Judas did) go to the Lord's Table with any bosom sin unrepented of, and without full purposes of amendment of life.

I pray you, therefore, consider with me the nature and circumstances of this sin of Judas, that, by the grace of God, we may all avoid that rock upon which he was lost.

I. And first; it was not this one sin that ruined Judas.

SERM. LXVII.

Men do not fill up the measure of their iniquities all at once. It was observed of him before, that he was *covetous*, and that being trusted with the money which Christ and His Apostles had to live on, he converted part of this unfaithfully to his own private use. St. John therefore says, *he was a thief.* [chap. 12. 6.]

Now, from hence we learn how dangerous it is to continue in any known sin; we cannot foresee what it will end in. If the love of money made Judas first a thief, and then a traitor; why should any man else think himself safe, when he has once provoked God to leave him to himself?

And here it will be proper to observe to you, that men are not so much their own masters as they are apt to think. Governed we *must* be, either by *the Spirit of God*, or by *an evil Spirit.*

Whenever men provoke God to withdraw *His* protection, that moment the devil takes them under *his* power, and, as the Scripture saith, "leads them captive at his will." It was thus with Judas; for, after eating the sop, we are told, the devil entered into him, and forced him immediately to go about his desperate undertaking. [2 Tim. 2. 26.] John 13. 27.

This shews the danger of resisting the Spirit of God,—of despising the day of grace,—and the folly of resolving to repent some time or other; as if we were our own masters, as if we could always do what is fit to be done, as if we could resist temptations when we pleased, as if we could foresee our ruin, and were of ourselves able to prevent it.

Was it so with Judas? You see it was not. You see him, when once God had forsaken him, you see him hurried by his new master to his ruin, by a wickedness which we are astonished at, and by a blindness and folly which would be unaccountable, if the Scriptures had not told us who had taken possession of him; and if we did not know by experience, that wicked men are not governed by reason, but by a power superior to them, and that they *must* do what that power will *have* them to do, let the crime be what it will.

When therefore people seem to wonder, how a man could possibly do such a wicked thing; how he could be so foolish as for a very trifle to ruin himself, &c.; it is because they have not well considered what the holy Scriptures have told

us concerning this matter, namely, *that it is the devil that worketh in the children of disobedience; that such will do the lusts of their father the devil,* whatever *reason* or *religion* say to the contrary. [Eph. 2. 2; John 8. 44.]

II. And this will appear still more evident, when we have considered another circumstance of his sin; namely, *that he had sufficient warning given him,* and such as might have hindered him from his designed wickedness, if he had been his *own master.*

St. Matthew tells us, that before they came to Jerusalem, even in the way, Jesus took the *Twelve,* and said unto them, *The Son of Man shall be betrayed unto the chief priests, and they shall condemn Him to death.* chap. 20. 18.

St. John tells us, that another time Jesus was troubled in spirit, and testified, saying, *One of you shall betray Me.* After this, when the Twelve were troubled, every man for himself, and asked our Lord this question,—*Is it I?* Judas did the same; to whom Jesus gave this plain answer, *Truly it is you.* chap. 13. 21. [Matt. 26. 25.]

Now, all this did not hinder him from his wicked purpose. And the reason was, he was not *now* his own master; so that neither *fear* for himself, nor *love* for his Lord, nor the *baseness* of the crime, could prevail with him to repent of his evil project.

You will perhaps say, that if he was not his own master, his crime was the less. By no means. He might have continued under the protection of God, if it had not been his own fault. It is true, the devil is still seeking whom he may devour; that is, whom he may be permitted to devour; but then, we are well assured, that he is permitted to be master of none but such as, by a course of wilful, presumptuous sins, have forced the Spirit of God to leave them to themselves.

And here let me tell you, that it is a very unwarrantable way of speaking, that some people have got, when they hear of any person falling into evil courses, or coming to some ill end: they say, he was born to it, it was his fortune, and the like. Pray hear what Christ said of Judas: "Woe unto that man by whom the Son of Man is betrayed." Jesus Christ would not have said so, if Judas had not brought this [Matt. 26. 24.]

SERM. LXVII.

evil upon his own head, by hardening his heart, and adding one sin to another, until God thought fit to permit the devil to enter into him, and *then* he filled up the measure of his iniquities.

Christians should rather learn from hence, to keep their consciences *tender* and *awake;* to take notice of the warnings given them; to repent while it is in their power; and above all things, they should consider very seriously what a desperate thing it is, to go to the Lord's Table, without full purposes of amendment of life. The very meaning of the word SACRAMENT is, *an oath or act by which every Christian binds himself to become Christ's faithful servant.*

Now to God, who knows all our hearts, and how sincere our repentance is; and how serious our purpose of leading a new life; to God, who knows this, it will be a most provoking crime, to go to the Lord's Table without considering what we are a doing; without *repentance,* without *faith* in God's mercy through Christ, without *charity,* and without *resolving to amend where we have done amiss.*

This was the very sin of Judas, which gave Satan full possession of him. For he was not content to entertain a most wicked design, but he would carry it off as if he were as faithful a disciple and servant as any Jesus had. And he had so well concealed his hypocrisy, that even his fellow disciples could not guess *him* to be *the man,* rather than any other.

But is a man the safer because he can conceal the purposes of his heart from men? Not at all. That which was the case of Judas will be the case of every presumptuous sinner. Every such act will set him farther out of God's favour, and give the devil still more power over him, till he has neither an *heart,* nor *power,* to repent.

III. Perhaps, you will say, it had been less a sin, if Judas had not come to his Lord's Table. Why, truly, so it had, while he had such a wicked design in his heart. But you will not sure infer from hence, that Christians had better forbear coming to the Sacrament of the Lord's Supper, than come where there is so much danger. I would desire you to consider this thing seriously.

One end of the Lord's Supper is to distinguish Christ's

servants from the subjects of the devil. "Do this," saith our Lord, "in remembrance of Me." This then is the short of the matter: if we do *not* come to the Lord's Table, we are not one with Christ, nor Christ with us. If we do come with evil in our hearts, we are just such servants as Judas was. But if we go to the Table of the Lord, with sincere desires of being *faithful* though *unworthy* servants of Christ, He will then accept us; He will forgive us what is past, and make us better for the time to come. [Luke 22. 19.]

Now, if this is the truth of the matter, *and it really is so*, one would wonder how any Christian dare lightly turn his back upon the Lord's Table, when he has an opportunity offered him; it is in effect saying, for *this time* I will *not* own myself a servant of Jesus Christ. The Lord's Supper is an outward sign or token, by which Christians profess, to all the world, that they are not ashamed of Christ crucified, but that they hope for salvation by His death.

IV. The next thing that I would have you to take notice of in this matter is, *the wonderful patience of our Saviour.* He knew who it was that should betray Him; and yet He bore with him so far, as to wash his feet the very night before He was betrayed.

Christians are too apt to rely (more than they have warrant for) upon God's patience. You see, by this man's example, that it is great presumption to do so, while we continue in sin. He bears with the greatest sinners; but if His goodness does not lead them to repentance, there is a time (you see), when Satan takes entire possession of them, and is permitted to do so, because God will no longer protect them from his rage and malice.

V. If, in the last place, we consider the bargain this miserable man made for himself, we may learn instruction even from *that* circumstance of his treason.

The sacred Scripture tells us, it was *for thirty pieces of silver;* that is, in our money, about three pounds fifteen shillings.

You wonder that a man should be so bewitched, as for such a wretched sum to be guilty of so horrid a crime. This shews us plainly how sin blinds the eyes of our minds. It is not Judas only that makes these mad bargains; every

SERM. LXVII.

man that sells his soul for *gain,* or *pleasure,* is as *mad,* and *blind,* as he was; and, when they come to die, will be convinced of it, as effectually as Judas was before he died, who then found his Master's words true to his cost, *What shall a man give in exchange for his soul?*

[Matt. 16. 26.]

VI. But you will say, perhaps, what is all this to us? We cannot (if we would be so wicked) betray our Lord, and bring destruction upon our heads, *by such a sin as his was?* But indeed the sacred Scriptures say we *may, and crucify Him too;* and that there are many that do so. I will shew you how: Well, then; what did Judas do more than deliver Christ into the hands of His enemies? And is it not a crime something like this, to bring that Church which He has purchased with His own blood into contempt? And do not all Christians do so, whose lives are not answerable to their profession? Who live as if they did not believe *one word* of what He taught, or suffered for us. Who (as far as it lies in their power) do, as the Apostle speaks, "tread under foot the Son of God, and count the blood of the covenant an unholy thing," as if Jesus Christ had suffered as an evil doer; "and do despite unto the spirit of grace." This is at least betraying the cause for which *He* suffered; and it is betraying it after such a manner as *Judas* did, namely, at the same time that we pretend to be His friends and servants.

Heb. 6. 6.

Heb. 10. 29.

And may not our Lord say of such, as He did of Judas? Behold! he that betrayeth me, one for whose ransom I have given my own life, one who is called by my name, who comes to my table as a friend, professing thereby to be a member of my family; who expects to be saved for my sake, to be raised by my power, and to be justified by faith in me; *even this man betrays me:* for, as soon as he goes from my table, he forgets the favours he *there* received, the promises he *there* made of being mine for ever; he goes amongst mine enemies, by whom my name and doctrine are blasphemed;—and he *lives* and *speaks* just as they do. So that you could not guess him to be a disciple of *mine,* but that he comes to my table; and that, you see, is only *to betray me,*—to make men believe, that I have indeed *no faithful servants;* that whatever my disciples pretend, they

would all, like Judas, betray *me*, and *my cause*, when they meet with a suitable temptation; to make men hope that I may be deceived, and pleased with an outward profession, with a formal visit to my house, or coming to my table as a friend, when, at the same time, they neither *respect* my person, nor *obey* my commands.

Now, that this is what our Lord may justly say, nay, what He *will say*, to all those Christians who do not live answerable to the means of grace His goodness affords them, is very plain from His own words: "Then shall ye begin to say, We have eaten and drunk in Thy presence. But He shall say, I tell you, I know you not whence you are; depart from me, ye workers of iniquity. There shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth, when ye shall see Abraham, and Isaac, and Jacob, and all the prophets, in the kingdom of God, and you yourselves thrust out." Luke 13. 26—28.

VII. This is the account of Judas, and of those that imitate him, and *this* their portion.

Let us cast our eyes upon *that Master* whom he so unworthily betrayed. And this Master was THE LORD JESUS CHRIST, who came down from heaven, to teach men how to please God, and how to be for ever happy. And though He was the Son of God, yet He took upon Him the nature of man, that He might more freely converse with men, and convince them of the mere vanity of *this* world, when compared with that happiness, which, by the favour of God, they might attain in the next. He first convinced His own disciples, that He came from God, by miracles which none but God can do; then He shewed them in what *true blessedness* consisted. He gave them rules of holy living; how to walk so as to please God; and by His own blessed example, He shewed them what was true piety, and to what a pitch of virtue men might attain, assisted by the grace of God.

And now, it being decreed from eternity, that man, having sinned, should not be pardoned and restored to God's favour, but by a sacrifice worthy of God, Jesus Christ (such was His love for men) was willing to become this sacrifice. But before His death, (that this instance of his love might never be forgotten,) He appointed that ordinance which we call *the Lord's Supper*, to which none, at their peril, should come, but such

SERM. LXVII.

as were, and sincerely purposed to continue, His faithful servants.

Judas was the first example of profaning that holy ordinance, and very dreadful was his punishment. St. Paul tells us, that the Corinthians, many of them, smarted for the same fault. And I have made choice of these awakening words of Christ, "Behold the hand of him that betrayeth Me is with Me on the table," to deter all such as would come to the Lord's Table *merely out of custom*, without examining themselves; as St. Paul directs all Christians to do, who would not draw down God's judgments upon their heads.

[1 Cor. 11. 30.]

And this *may* be done, and acceptably too, by the most unlearned Christian; *otherwise it would not be a duty.*

Every Christian knows, for example, where he has done amiss; and he knows too, whether he has taken pains to reform. Every Christian, upon due examination, can tell, whether he has kept the vows he made when he was last at the Lord's Table; and he knows that if he has not, there will *now* be need of a better preparation.

By this ordinance *we do shew the Lord's death till He come;* that is, till He come to judgment.

[1 Cor. 11. 26.]

Now, every Christian can tell whether he orders his life so as to have reasonable hopes of mercy at that *great day;* otherwise the Lord's Supper must needs be an occasion of sorrow, as well as guilt. And a man must go with a sad heart to *that table*, where he must make *those vows* which he knows he does not design to keep. Lastly; every Christian knows, that when we go to the Lord's Table, our duty is, to give up ourselves to God, as we did at our baptism, to resolve to live so as becomes the Gospel of Christ, and to call ourselves to an account whether we do so or not. He that does not do this goes rashly and unworthily to the Lord's Table, and has reason to fear the consequence; since he abuses that means, which, *of all others*, was designed to secure us in the fear of God, and in His favour.

VIII. I have not, good Christians, set this history before you to affright you, or to drive you from the Lord's Table, but to persuade you to come, as Christians ought to do.

First, in obedience to the command of Christ, "Do this in remembrance of Me."

[Luke 22. 19.]

Secondly, out of a sense of your own wants, and to obtain those graces which are necessary to your salvation.

Thirdly, with full purposes of amending where you have done amiss.

And, *fourthly,* resolving to shew your thankfulness for God's mercies to you, by walking more warily for the time to come; striving against those sins which you are most apt to fall into, avoiding those temptations which have formerly overpowered you, and praying daily for grace to overcome them.

And therefore, I tell you again, that if you hope to avoid the danger of *receiving unworthily,* by forbearing to go to the Lord's Table, you will be miserably mistaken. For whatever it is which indeed *ought* to hinder you from going to the Lord's Table, the same will keep you also out of heaven.

And pray consider, how careful parents are, to have their children *baptized,* that they may have a *real title* to the *favour of God,* and an interest in *the covenant of grace.*

But why all this care, if you do not oblige them, when they come of age, to undertake themselves what you promised for them? If you do not set them an example of religion, and bring them to the Lord's Table, *there* to renew their vows, and to claim a right to the grace of God promised to all worthy receivers of that holy ordinance? Alas! if you do not do *this,* you only breed them up in a mistake, that a *Christian name,* without a *Christian life,* may be of some use to them; a mistake which too many are apt to run into, though the Apostle assures us, "that without holiness no man shall see the Lord." [Heb. 12. 14.]

I shall now conclude, after I have recommended a few things to be *seriously considered and remembered by you.*

As, *first,* you see how careful people should be, when either they *make* or *renew* their vows, not to do it rashly, but upon due consideration. God, *who sees the heart,* is, no doubt of it, well pleased to see people come before Him with honest purposes of doing what they can to please Him; and He will certainly reward such with grace necessary to their present condition. But if you come merely out of custom, or to comply with the laws of the Church, without minding what you are about to do, why then God, who sees the inward dis-

SERM. LXVII.

position of your heart as plainly as we do your outward behaviour, *will not give you His Spirit, nor His blessing.*

It is true, when we were infants, God received us into favour and covenant, by virtue of that promise, "I will be a God to thee and to thy seed." We were then made members of the Church of Christ, children of God, and heirs of the kingdom of heaven.

[Gen. 17. 7; Rom. 9. 8.]

Now, because Christians are too apt to fall into a carnal security, they are often called upon, to try whether their faith and lives be answerable to their profession; and if they have not been so, to take up better purposes for the time to come, and to be very earnest with God for grace to enable them to perform the vows they make of better obedience. To this end, some are called upon to take upon themselves their baptismal vow; others to renew that vow at the Lord's Table. If you do this in the sincerity of your hearts, God will certainly bless you with more light to know your duty, and more ability to perform it; if you do not, you will find to your cost, that you have received the grace of God, given at your baptism, in vain.

Secondly; you see by this sad instance of Judas, that one may go to the table of the Lord, without being a friend of Christ,—*without being a true Christian,*—without receiving any benefit from that holy ordinance. And, therefore, as you value your souls, do not depend upon *that* without a life answerable to your profession.

Our Lord Himself has told us what His answer will be to such as shall plead this privilege, *Have we not eat and drank at Thy Table?* when, in the mean time, they dishonoured Him by their ungodly lives: "Depart from Me, ye workers of iniquity, I know you not;" that is, I will not own you for My friends or disciples. If this is all we shall have to plead, Judas could say the same; and yet how dreadful was his punishment! And the more so, because he abused so many opportunities of securing his Lord's grace and favours, being so often a guest at His Table.

[Luke 13. 27.]

Well then, if ye would avoid the sin of Judas, by all means go to the Lord's Table NOW YE ARE SO SOLEMNLY INVITED; but do not go with a wicked heart. If you are not in charity with all men; if you are conscious that you have done any

wrong, and are not willing, and resolved as soon as possible, to make amends; if you do not, to the best of your power, follow that rule of your Lord, "To do to others, as you would they should do to you;" if you live in any known sin, such as *covetousness*, (which you know was Judas's peculiar vice,) or *drunkenness*, or *profaning the Lord's Day or His holy Name;* if you live in a careless neglect of yourselves and of your families, never calling upon God for a blessing upon your labours, or upon your children, or giving Him thanks for the blessings you every day receive at His hands; why then, you have no business to go to His Table, unless you solemnly resolve to amend where you have done amiss, and *so resolve* as to begin a reformation even before you go to the Lord's Supper. Otherwise, never expect either *benefit* or *comfort* from that holy ordinance. [Matt. 7. 12.]

And pray remember, that when you go to the Lord's Table, it is one part of your business there, *to shew the Lord's death till He come;* that is, till He come to judgment.

Now, this thought should put us all upon considering how our accounts stand? Whether we have reason, according to the terms of the Gospel, to hope for mercy *at that day?* If we *have not*, it concerns us very much to think of a *new life.*

Lastly; that which made the sin of Judas so *intolerable a burden*, when his eyes were open, *was*, that he saw his Lord, who had been so kind to him, so unworthily treated, and that *by his means.*

Now, should not this put Christians upon thinking what contempt and reproach they bring upon Christ and His doctrine, when they go, as friends, to His Table; and yet no sooner come from thence, but join with His *bitterest enemies* to make the *Table of the Lord contemptible?* So that *weak* or *wicked people* cry, what should we go to the Lord's Supper for? Those that go are no better than those that stay away. Where is the power, where is the grace, that attends it? They say, that by *this ordinance* they are *one with Christ*, and that Christ is *their head.* Would they have us to judge of Christ by His members? [Mal. 1. 7.]

Thus *we* betray, thus *they* crucify Him.

The good Lord grant that all you, who purpose, at this

SERM. LXVII.

most solemn time, to be guests at the Lord's Table, that you may prepare yourselves to come worthily; that others seeing your good works, and the good effects of God's grace given you at His Table, may *think* and *speak* worthily of our Saviour, and be prevailed with to become His faithful servants; that *we* and *they* may, by Him, be made eternally happy, through the same Jesus Christ. To whom, with the Father and the Holy Spirit, be ascribed all honour, power, and glory, now and for ever. *Amen.*

SERMON LXVIII.

A DISTINCT PART OF THE HISTORY OF OUR SAVIOUR'S RESURRECTION PRACTICALLY CONSIDERED AND APPLIED.

MATT. xxviii. 11—15.

Now when they were going, behold, some of the watch came into the city, and shewed unto the chief priests all the things that were done. And when they were assembled with the elders, and had taken counsel, they gave large money unto the soldiers, saying, Say ye, His disciples came by night, and stole Him away while we slept. And if this come to the governor's ears, we will persuade him, and secure you. So they took the money, and did as they were taught: and this saying is commonly reported among the Jews until this day.

MY design, in the choice of these words, is not to raise your indignation against the Jews, for persisting so far in their wickedness, as to endeavour to stifle the truth, by lies and bribery; for *they* did what *all men*, destitute of the grace of God, and following the bent of corrupt nature, are *apt* to do, *have* done, and *will* do, to the end of the world.

Neither would I take pains to shew the folly of this story, with which, after they had assembled the *elders*, and *taken counsel*, they possessed the heads and minds of the people: for all wickedness is *folly* at the bottom, let there be never so many to counsel it.

But there being a great many very useful instructions which may naturally be drawn from this history and passage, and which may serve to shew us our *own* sin and folly, as well as that of the Jews; that we are as liable to the same obstinacy and unbelief as *they* were, if we are not careful to preserve our minds from the prejudices *they* laboured under; that it is *not* for want of sufficient proofs, that there are so many unbelievers, but chiefly for want of *good dispositions, honest hearts*, and *integrity* of manners; and, lastly, that *truth* will get the better of *falsehood*, of *lies*, and of *impos-*

SERM. LXVIII.

ture, at the last, though all the world combine to stifle and oppose it.

These being useful instructions, and natural consequences from this part of the history of our *Saviour's resurrection*, I would, by the assistance of God's good Spirit, so treat of them, as that we may better see the prejudices we labour under; that we may endeavour to get clear of them; and that our faith in *this*, as well as in the other articles of the Christian religion, may be found unreprovable in the sight of God.

I. It appears very strange to *us*, at first sight, that the Jews, who had in their hands the many prophecies of the Messiah, who expected and prayed for His coming, should yet so violently oppose Him when He appeared amongst them. And yet this is very easily accounted for: their hearts and affections were much set upon *this* world; they expected, and they hoped for, such a Redeemer, as would fight their battles, overcome their enemies that kept them under, and who should set them above all the nations of the earth.

Now, it was plainly impossible, that people, under such prejudices and expectations as these, should generally receive our Saviour in the mean and humble circumstances in which He appeared. He owned and declared, that His kingdom was not of this world; that His followers must expect no earthly power or preferment from *Him;* and His appearance was accordingly. He affected *no grandeur*, He refused the very honours that were offered Him; and all His discourses to those poor people with whom He for the most part conversed, were concerning a world to come, and how they might fit themselves for future happiness, by refusing the present.

It is true, there were people who received this doctrine, and Him that brought it: but who were they? Why, such only whose affections were not too much set upon the things of this life; such as were convinced this is not the world they were made for; such as were sensible of, and mourned for their sins and infirmities; the humble and meek in spirit, the pure in heart, all such as desired to *know* and to *do* the will of God: to all these the appearance and the doctrines

of Jesus Christ were very reasonable and acceptable; to all others He was a *stumbling-block* and an offence.

And we shall not wonder it was so with the Jews, when we consider, that it is just so with us at this day.

The truths of the Gospel are preached, explained, recommended, insisted upon, as absolutely necessary to be believed and observed by all that hear them, as they hope for salvation. You need not be told, that many, very many, whose interest it is to hear these truths, do not at all regard them. The thing is too plain to be questioned.

Do you believe that such people would have been convinced of their error, and would have mended their lives, if they had heard our Saviour Himself, and seen His miracles? In truth, they would not.

Our Saviour Himself tells us, that men who will not hearken to the ordinary means of conversion, *they that will not hear Moses and the Prophets,* "will not be persuaded, though one rose from the dead:" and constant experience bears witness to this truth. [Luke 16. 31.]

One man is affected with those passages of the Gospel, which another takes no notice of; one is convinced and converted, while another is hardened by the same arguments. What can be the reason of this, but that all men are not equally disposed to receive the truth, when it is fairly proposed to them?

Why else should the Jews be so very desirous to have our Saviour's resurrection disbelieved, as to break through all the rules of conscience and honesty, to discredit that truth? Why, this was truly their case: they had entertained in their hearts an aversion to His person and character, because of the humble condition in which He appeared; they hated His doctrine, because it discovered their vile hypocrisy, and required such a righteousness as far exceeded that they boasted of; they decried His miracles, because they were wrought to confirm a doctrine which they would not receive: in short; they proceeded so far at last, as by false accusations and false witnesses to take away His life; and, being thus prejudiced against Him, they could not hear of His *resurrection from the dead,* but with the utmost disdain and vexation of mind; for *this* made them murderers, at least, of

SERM. LXVIII.

a person beloved of God, who otherways would not have raised Him to life again, after *they* had crucified Him.

These things put them upon this vile act set down in the text,—to hire men to set abroad a lie, which they themselves had forged.

And there is nothing in this whole proceeding, which is not natural, and which is not acted every day by men who are given over to a mind void of judgment. They hate the persons and the characters of such as plainly reprove them; they hate the doctrines which would restrain them from following their own inclinations; and by these prejudices are prepared to do the vilest thing to discredit what they hate so bitterly.

Now, these passages are recorded in the Gospel, and in other Scriptures, not to make us find fault with others, but that we may discover the corruption of our own hearts, by the faults we may observe in other people.

And in this instance we learn how very hard it is, when we have done a *weak*, or an *ill* thing, to be brought to own it, and to confess that we have been in the wrong.

The Jews here would not consider what a wicked thing they had done, and how bitterly they ought to repent of it, if this person whom they had crucified were indeed, what He said He was, *the Son of God*. And yet, if what the soldiers said were true, it was manifest, He was *more than man;* and yet they durst not enquire into the truth of this, because it would necessarily create in them great trouble of mind; they therefore took the short and usual way to get rid of the shame and confusion which attends conviction; they gave out, that Christ was not risen, but that His disciples had stolen Him away, and they hired others to say the same thing; hoping, by this means, to get quit of the shame of having murdered an innocent person. As for the guilt of such an act, such persons seldom lay that to heart.

Now, what are we to learn from all this? Why, in the first place, never to take up a prejudice against any thing or person, without reason; for it is plain we cannot lay it down when we please. There is no question of it, but that these very elders, who agreed to give money to propagate a lie of their own making, yet spoke what they thought, when, but

three days before, they mockingly told our Saviour, that if He would come down from the cross, they would believe Him to be the Messiah. Alas! we do not know what will convince a mind averse to the truth.

For though God was not pleased to gratify the demands of those wicked men, and to satisfy them after their own way (because He knew nothing would convince them); yet when He did that very thing, which they said would satisfy them, after a more wonderful way; when He had suffered Him to die upon the cross, and to be buried in their sight; when their malice and their caution could go no further; then God took Him out of their hands, raised Him to life, made *their own watch* witnesses of His resurrection: which was a much greater miracle than they demanded, and yet they did not believe, but very wickedly attempted to pervert the truth, by bribing the watch.

II. And we have another instance, in *this watch*, of the corruption and deceitfulness of all our hearts. It was but just before that they were so terrified with the sight of an angel, that they became as dead men. And one would have thought they should not so soon have forgotten their fears, or be tempted with the greatest reward to set about a lie, which they very well knew to be so. But while we wonder at this, we do not consider that this is too often acted by ourselves.

The providence of God brings us into troubles, terrifies us with His judgments, and yet no sooner are we recovered of our fears, but we return to our old ways, and are ready for any wickedness the tempter shall lead us into.

When therefore, we resent the hard-heartedness either of the Jews or their watch, when we wonder at them, let us look to ourselves, lest we be guilty of the same crimes of which we accuse them; let us consider, that the Son of God may *be crucified again, and put to open shame;* that this [Heb. 6. 6.] is often done, not by the Jews, *His professed enemies,* but by Christians, who are called by His name.

Let us consider, that if we live as if we were never to rise again, we do, as much as in us lieth, baffle all the arguments and proofs which God has given us of our *Saviour's* and of our *own* resurrection.

SERM. LXVIII.

It is true, Christ is risen from the dead, and will come again to judge the world in righteousness; this is true, and will come to pass, whether we believe it or not. But yet we may, by our wicked lives, very much hinder the effects this truth ought to have upon all that hear of it; and so far we are guilty of the same sin the Jews are branded for; we endeavour to persuade men, that Christ is not risen, and that they need not fear the consequences of a resurrection.

III. *But truth will get the better of falsehood, let who will combine to stifle it.* And God will be glorified in the destruction of those who shall despise the means He has ordained for their salvation. We see this very plainly in the instance before us; and while God (the God of truth) governs the world, it must be so.

And here we cannot but admire the wonderful simplicity of the Gospel,—as if the holy penmen were not concerned what the world would think of what they had left upon record. If any of us were to have written this part of the history, how should we have been tempted to have reflected upon the elders of the Jews for this base practice, in acting contrary to their own consciences, drawing other people into the sin and snare, and imposing a lie upon posterity, which they themselves had forged! How should we have endeavoured to have exposed the folly of these people, who, *after taking counsel too,* advised the most absurd thing to be told, advised people to say what was done while they themselves were asleep!

But, however agreeable this would be to *our* reason and inclinations, this is not the way of the Spirit of God, who only relates the matter of fact, and lets us know that this story was current amongst the Jews, even till the time when this Gospel was written, which was about eight years after these things happened.

And indeed this is exactly agreeable to the way of the Spirit of God in the Old Testament. When He gives us, for instance, an account of the creation, He is not solicitous to prove that *there is a God;* He justly supposes that those people, who cannot see God in His works, will not be convinced by all the arguments that can possibly be made use of; and that none do ever make it a doubt whether God

made the world, but those who think it their interest to question His being.

And in very deed, we seem over careful and wise, when we are very solicitous to prove, by arguments drawn from human reason, the great truths of religion, which from the beginning were effectually secured and established by the providence of God, and will ever be received and embraced by all such as are ordained to (that is, disposed for) eternal life.

IV. *Unbelievers, it is true, there are many, but not for want of sufficient proofs, but chiefly for want of good dispositions, and a just sense of their condition.* It is with many of us at this day, as it was with the rulers of the Jews: a miracle they own was done by the Apostles; but the consequence of being convinced of this was not, that they embraced the Gospel, or believed in *Him* by whose name and power that miracle had been wrought; instead of that, they strictly charged the Apostles not to preach or teach any more in that name. Here was no want of means, but want of a will to be converted.

And indeed the severest truths, and most contrary to our corrupt nature, will be received, when the grace of God meets with an humble, teachable disposition. Those, for instance, who live like men that hope for advantage by a resurrection, will willingly receive that article as well as any of the rest; they will easily perceive, for example, that it could not be the interest of any body to preach a doctrine so contrary to flesh and blood, and which obliged the teachers themselves to a very strict life and conversation, and to a perpetual watchfulness over their words and actions. They will easily perceive, that the Apostles of Jesus Christ could not affirm that they saw the Lord, and conversed with Him, after His resurrection, for many days together, if they had not been truly certain of this, and were convinced that it was their duty to publish this to the world. For what did they get by bearing this testimony? Nothing but scorn and contempt; at least, from the greatest part of their hearers.

And let us here observe, that this case of the Apostles and disciples of Christ is very different from those persons, who, in all ages, have suffered reproach and punishments for set-

SERM. LXVIII.

ting up doctrines of their own invention, for the commandments and ordinances of God.

A man may (for instance), prejudiced by education, or heated by passion, or possessed by an evil spirit, embrace falsehoods for truths, propagate them zealously, and suffer for them; believing himself, all this while, in the right, and suffering for a righteous cause, and bound in conscience to propagate the things he has thus embraced for truths at the hazard of his life: but this was not the case of those that bare testimony, and suffered for the truth of the Gospel. They declared and suffered for a matter in which they could not possibly be deceived. They affirmed (for instance) that Jesus Christ, with whom they had conversed some years, and who had taught them the way of salvation; after He had been crucified in the face of the world, the third day rose again from the dead, and conversed with them for many days together, and instructed them in the things concerning His kingdom. This was a matter in which neither prejudice, nor pride, nor worldly interest, nor any other passion, could have any place. They only affirmed what they could not but know, *if it was true;* and they suffered death rather than conceal or deny giving their testimony to what they knew for certain.

This was what every *wise*, and *good*, and *honest man* ought to do; and such a man will never countenance those, who embrace errors without reason, and suffer rather than forego them, or leave off to propagate them to the world.

In short; to suffer for a truth, which is plainly contained in the Holy Scriptures, which Scriptures have been attested by matters of fact, and confirmed by miracles; to suffer for righteousness' sake; that is, for not consenting to, and complying with customs and manners plainly forbid by the Gospel; this is to suffer as a Christian, and such sufferings will certainly be rewarded at the resurrection of the just.

But to suffer for matters in themselves indifferent, which neither set forth the glory of God, nor, in truth, set forward the salvation of men, by leading them to faith and virtue; this is to suffer, not for conscience, but for humour's sake; it may therefore deserve pity, but not reward.

To conclude the whole: we see, by this act of the elders

of the Jews, how far people may be led by *self-love, worldly interest, vain-glory,* and *prejudice,* to do very abominable things, which they would hate and condemn at another time, and in other people. We see in *them,* how one wickedness does almost necessarily draw on and make way for another. We here learn, how going against reason and conscience does blind the heart, and so darken the understanding, that it destroys at last *good sense, natural modesty,* and *common honesty.*

After all, we are very much mistaken, if we imagine, and conclude from hence, that *they* were the most blinded and obstinate people that ever lived, or, in Christ's words, that *they were sinners above all people.* [Luke 13. 2, &c.]

It is matter of fact, that the same steps, the same self-love, the same love of the world, the same consenting to known iniquity, will lead any of us to the very same blindness, to the same hard-heartedness, to the same unreasonable wickedness, which we see and condemn in *them.*

We learn from hence, that it is not worth our while to contend for any thing, however grateful to our passions, except the truth. We may persuade ignorant people; but the providence of God will at last scatter the mist with which we darkened their eyes, and they will see their error, and the vile wickedness of those that imposed upon them, as plain as we now see the malice and the folly of these people.

In one word; the great care and caution of the Jews, in sealing the sepulchre, in setting a watch, and afterwards in bribing that very watch to set about a lie; all these methods, which they took to discredit our blessed Saviour's doctrine and resurrection, by the providence of God, were made to serve the better to confirm this important article of the Christian faith.

Let us then leave them, and come to ourselves.

The very same God, who has given us so great an assurance, and so plain a testimony, that there will be *a resurrection,* and *a life to come,* has given us the same proof, that there is something on our part to be done, to make that life a blessing.

It is not to repeat the Creed that makes a Christian, but to add to our faith *virtue;* to make a conscience of our ways; [2 Pet. 1. 5.] to live soberly, righteously, and godly, in this present world.

If we confess with our mouths the Lord Jesus, *and believe* [Rom. 10. 9.]

SERM. LXVIII.

with our hearts that God hath raised Him from the dead, we may be saved. But then let us consider what this means: *believe with the heart;* that is, so consider the importance of His resurrection, as that it holds forth to us an infallible instance and proof of God's power and decree to raise up all men from the dead; those that have done good, to endless glory; and such as have done evil, and have not repented and brought forth fruit meet for repentance, to misery everlasting.

So that the belief of a resurrection, and a life to come, will easily be perceived to be of no manner of advantage to any man who does not order his life according to the laws of the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

To those that do resolve, by God's gracious assistance, to do so; to all such, this article holds forth to them matter of great comfort. They are hereby assured, that if they want or suffer, or sometimes are under doubts and fears *here*, a time will come when all these shall be at an end, and they shall at last be comforted.

It was for *this*, and such-like reasons, that the Christian world has ever made the festival of our Saviour's resurrection a time of serious joy, and rejoicing. But, for such as have not any reason to rejoice in the knowledge of a resurrection, and yet *do rejoice* for company, is as unfit and thoughtless, as it would be for men, who live by robbery, to rejoice because the laws have made it death to do so.

Rather let us express our gratitude to God for His mercies to us in Jesus Christ, and shew forth our thankfulness for the same, by the way Jesus Christ Himself has appointed; obliging ourselves, by the blessed Sacrament we receive at this good time, to live holy lives for the time to come.

[Heb. 13. 20, 21.]

And may the God of peace, that brought again from the dead our Lord Jesus Christ, that great Shepherd of the sheep, through the blood of the everlasting covenant, make us perfect in every good work, to do His will; working in us that which is well-pleasing in His sight, through Jesus Christ! To Whom, with the Father and the Holy Ghost, be all honour and glory, now and for ever. *Amen.*

SERMON LXIX.

EASTER-DAY.

THE DELIVERANCE OF THE CHILDREN OF ISRAEL FROM THEIR BONDAGE IN EGYPT, A TYPE OF THE REDEMPTION OF THE WORLD BY JESUS CHRIST.

EXODUS xii. 26, 27.

And it shall come to pass, when your children shall say unto you, What mean you by this service? That ye shall say, It is the sacrifice of the Lord's passover, who passed over the houses of the children of Israel in Egypt, when He smote the Egyptians, and delivered our houses.

THE Church has made choice of this twelfth chapter of Exodus, for part of the service for *this day*, with great reason. We have, in this chapter, an account of the *greatest deliverance* that ever people had from a bondage and slavery the most grievous and dreadful. And the way by which God brought this about was *still more wonderful.*

The Egyptians, who had oppressed the Israelites, and evil intreated them for a long time, paid dearly for it at last, and felt the displeasure of God in a number of the most *remarkable plagues* that ever nation had suffered. And when these would not do, God, to shew them their sin in their punishment,—for they had barbarously murdered all the male children of the Israelites,—God therefore resolved in one night to destroy all the first-born in the land of Egypt, both of man and beast; which sentence was accordingly executed: but that the Israelites might escape in this dreadful calamity, they were the evening before commanded to kill, every family, a lamb; and to sprinkle the blood upon the door-posts of their houses, that the destroying angel, seeing

SERM. LXIX.

the blood, might *pass over them.* This destruction was so terrible and surprising to the Egyptians, that they entreated and even forced *them* to be gone, whom so lately they had held in subjection.

Thus was this deliverance wrought; and, *that it might never be forgotten,* God Himself ordained, that every year, upon that very day, for all generations to come, the people of Israel should *keep the passover;* that is, that they should kill a lamb, sprinkle the blood upon the doors of their houses, eat it with bitter herbs, with their loins girded, and their staves in their hands, as men ready to take a journey.

All which was done for many great reasons, and particularly for *this set down in the text;* that when their children, in the ages to come, should ask them, what they mean by *this service?* they might then give them an account of the bitter bondage they had suffered, of the manner and strangeness of their deliverance, of the great blessing of being under the immediate direction of God; to the end that they, and their posterity, having this great work of God every year represented to them after a manner so easy to be understood by the meanest Israelite, might learn to fear *Him* who had been so terrible to their enemies; and to serve *Him* faithfully all their days, who had been so good and kind to them.

And this service was deemed so necessary, to keep up the remembrance of these things, and to secure the favour of God, that it was commanded by God Himself, under no less a penalty than this: "Whoever shall despise or neglect to observe this service, that soul shall be cut off from the congregation of Israel;" that is, he shall be excommunicated. [Exod. 12. 15.]

And indeed an Israelite, *when come to years of discretion,* who did not give *this testimony of his being within the covenant,* had no right to the promises which God had made to Abraham and to his seed for ever.

Now, this deliverance being both a figure and prophecy of a much greater deliverance, which Jesus Christ was to work for them and for the whole world, this service was ordered to be observed and remembered by all their generations, for ever; that is, until God should by a new revelation alter it. And this prophecy was most exactly fulfilled; for Jesus Christ was crucified, (and by His blood delivered us,) the

very same month, the very same day, and expired the very same hour, that the paschal lamb was killed.

But what is all this to us? Why, I will tell you: the *bondage* of the children of Israel in Egypt, their *deliverance* out of that slavery, their *sojourning* and *rebellion* in the wilderness forty years, their *entrance* into the land of Canaan, were all *types* (that is, *figures* and *representations*) of what God would afterwards bring to pass. Particularly, the *paschal lamb* was a representation of a *greater sacrifice*, and *deliverance*, which was to be wrought, not for one nation only, but for all the nations of the earth. Which *great deliverance*, in God's good time, was accomplished, when He sent His only Son into the world; who took our nature upon Him, made known to us the will of God, set us an example how we ought to walk and to please God, became a sacrifice for the sins of the whole world; and to give us the utmost *proof* and *security* that whatever He had *said*, or *done*, or *taught, was well-pleasing to God*, GOD RAISED HIM FROM THE DEAD; leaving all men without excuse, who shall know these things, and yet shall *reject the counsel of God*, and despise so great a mercy: a mercy so great, that the whole world cannot make us happy without it!

And therefore Jesus Christ, to keep up the memory of His precious death until His coming again, ordained the *same solemn service*, in effect, to be continued, which had been observed by the children of Israel ever since their deliverance out of Egypt; only instead of the PASCHAL LAMB, which was a type of His *death to come*, He appointed BREAD AND WINE, to represent the sacrifice, and preserve the remembrance, of His death *now past*.

And this, by the way, is the true reason why the Church requires it of all Christians, that, *at this time especially*, they should receive the Sacrament of the Lord's Supper, this being the *very time* when their great deliverance was wrought, and when these memorials of it were appointed.

And though the penalty of not receiving the Sacrament is not expressed in the very words of the old institution, THAT SOUL SHALL BE CUT OFF; yet indeed the penalty is far greater; for such as refuse to keep up the remembrance of Christ's death, by the solemn service which He has or-

SERM. LXIX.

dained, do in effect despise His death, and the favours He has thereby obtained for all His faithful servants. After all, I am sensible how difficult it is to possess our hearts with a just sense of *this mercy*.

The children of Israel, *feeling the smart of their bitter bondage*, no wonder that they rejoiced, *from their very hearts*, when they found themselves delivered from *such a slavery*.

It is true, we also rejoice upon every return of this season; but, God knows, with what insincere affections! And the very reason *is*, we do not *know*, nor *feel*, our misery; for if we did, our souls would be possessed with such a *sincere joy*, upon the sight of the means of our recovery from the power of Satan, and the bondage of corruption, that we should be able to convince others, who shall ask us the *meaning of this service*, with what *good reason* the whole Christian Church *has ever observed it*.

Whenever people begin to be seriously concerned for their *eternal welfare*, there are *three things* which never fail to give them great uneasiness of mind.

First; the *guilt of the sins* they have already committed.

Secondly; the *power of sin*, which they feel themselves subject to.

And, *Thirdly*; the *fear of death*, and its consequences.

To know that I have transgressed the laws of God, and have thereby provoked Him to anger; to find myself so much under the dominion of sin as to love and obey it, even when I know it will be my ruin; lastly, to foresee *that* death which I cannot avoid, and, what is as tormenting, to fear what will become of me afterwards: verily, these are *such evils*, that a man, whose eyes are open, and whose conscience is awake, would choose to undergo all the hardships of an Egyptian slavery, provided he could but be *delivered from this spiritual bondage*.

And this is what Jesus Christ, by His death and resurrection, has obtained for all that are disposed and willing to receive the favour. For "through Him is preached forgiveness of sins" to all such as repent, and resolve to forsake them; He has also procured for us such graces and helps as are necessary to secure us against all our spiritual enemies, and

[Acts 13. 38.]

the corruption of our nature; and He hath taken out the sting of death, and made it a blessing, instead of a torment, to all his faithful servants.

If, therefore, a stranger to our religion should ask us, what is the meaning of this service? we should answer him, that all mankind were in a state of bondage and slavery; slaves to their own corrupt affections, slaves to the power of evil spirits, slaves to the fear of death, and to the fear of what may follow; that Jesus Christ has delivered us from this slavery and bondage; and that we keep this service, that neither we, nor those that come after us, may ever forget this great deliverance; for that we had no power to deliver ourselves out of this bondage and slavery, no more than the Israelites had to deliver themselves, unless God had undertaken to redeem us.

Now, that we may truly value the *work of our redemption*, and rejoice with reason as oft as we remember it, it will be necessary that we take a view of our misery in the three instances just now mentioned. For too true it is, notwithstanding the bondage we are *certainly* in, too, too many make a shift not to see or feel their misery and danger. With the Israelites (who are a lively figure of the generality of Christians) they are not pleased with their deliverer; but cry, *would to God we had staid in Egypt!* forget the hardships they there underwent, and upon every temptation, are for returning back, despising their redemption. [Exod. 16. 3.]

But though people may for a while divert themselves from seeing their misery or danger, yet when the conscience is once awake, as sometime it will be, we shall be so sensible of the bondage of sin and death, that all temporal evils will appear as nothing in comparison of the *wrath of God.*

That we may escape this, it will be necessary, that we seriously consider *what we are by nature*, and *what we may be by the favour and merits of our Redeemer.* And this I shall endeavour to do, in explaining the *three particulars* beforementioned, namely, *the guilt of sin*, the *power* it has over us, and *the fear of death.* From all which we can only *be redeemed* by Jesus Christ.

I. Let us first consider, *the bondage we are in upon the account of the sins we have already committed.*

If people know themselves to be sinners, and yet can be

SERM. LXIX.

easy without knowing how they may obtain forgiveness, it is only because they do not apprehend the danger they are in. They do not know "that the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men." For if they did, they would certainly be afraid for themselves, "and fear Him who can destroy both body and soul in hell."

Rom. 1. 18.

[Matt. 10. 28.]

And if men are not under any trouble on the account of their sins, the sacred Scriptures give us the true reason, "The God of this world" (that is, Satan) "hath blinded the minds of them that believe not;" so that "the things of the Spirit are foolishness unto them." "They cannot see afar off;" that is, they do not foresee the misery that is like to come upon them. They shut their eyes against *that light* which would make them *see* and *feel* the slavery they are subject to.

2 Cor. 4. 4.

1 Cor. 2. 14.

2 Pet. 1. 9.

The Apostle tells us, that "by the Law is the knowledge of sin." And whoever will hear the Law and the Prophets, will plainly perceive the condition a sinner is in before his guilt is taken away.

Rom. 3. 20.

Is it for nothing, do we imagine, that the Law saith, as the Apostle quotes it, "Cursed is every one who continueth not in all things which are written in the book of the Law, to do them?"

Gal. 3. 10.

Is it for nothing, that David, upon calling his sins to remembrance, expresseth himself after this sensible manner? "Thine arrows stick fast in me, and Thine hand presseth me sore. There is no soundness in my flesh, because of Thine anger; neither is there any rest in my bones, because of my sin. For mine iniquities are gone over my head; as a heavy burden, they are too heavy for me. I am troubled; I am bowed down greatly; I go mourning all the day long; I am feeble and sore broken; I have roared by reason of the disquietness of my heart."

Ps. 38. 2, &c.

And let us assure ourselves, that these are the pains, this is the bondage of every man, when he comes to be thoroughly awake. He will be *afflicted,* he will *loath* himself in his own sight, and in the anguish of his soul he will cry out, What shall I do to be forgiven? *What shall I do to be saved?*

To cure, or to prevent, these *sad reflections,* some shut their eyes, some divert themselves, some strive to forget their

sins, others to lessen them. But all this will not do; for there is a power above us; and there are seasons when He will set our sins before us in their *true colours*, and will make us to *see* them, whether we will or not. And then we shall be convinced, and confess, that our sins deserve the wrath and vengeance of God.

And this is not all our misery neither; for we have not only sinned against God, and feel bitter remorse for what is past. But,

II. Secondly; *we are by nature under the power and dominion of sin; and if we are left to ourselves, we shall go on to obey it, against reason, against conscience, though we are sure to be ruined by it.*

The Scripture assures us, and we see it with our eyes, that we are slaves to the most unreasonable passions and desires. Some have *set their hearts upon iniquity*. Others have gone so far, as that they *cannot cease from sin*. Some have sold themselves *to work wickedness*. Some *make a mock of sin*. While others *make their heart as an adamant stone, lest they should hear the Law*.

Hos. 4. 8; 2 Pet. 2. 14; 1 Kings 21. 25; Prov. 14. 9; Zech. 7. 12.

Some sin, even when the hand of God is upon them; and others, when He shews them favour. Some think and say, that it is in vain to serve God. And many are so wicked as to think it strange, that others *run not with them into the same excess*.

Ps. 78. 31, 32; Isa. 26. 10; Job 21. 15.

1 Pet. 4. 4.

Now, if this is not a slavery to be lamented, we must be utterly insensible of danger. It may be, you may imagine that this is but the case of a few profligate wretches, *who are sold under sin;* but, be not deceived, *this is the state of all men by nature;* and men must be strangers to themselves, who do not perceive it to be so. How many have been almost persuaded to be Christians, and after all have fallen back into a state of insensibility! How many have been under strong convictions of guilt, and have made resolutions of better obedience, and yet have returned with the dog to his vomit!

It is not to discourage you, that I mention so many instances of our bondage and slavery, but to awaken us all into a just sense of our danger, and that we may be thankful to our GREAT DELIVERER.

SERM. LXIX.

III. But there is still another instance of *our bondage*, and that is, THE FEAR OF DEATH, which, as the Apostle tells
Heb. 2. 15. us, "subjects us to bondage all our life long." And indeed, there is nothing in nature so truly terrible to an unregenerate person, as the thoughts, but especially *the sight of death*. People may strive to stifle and disguise their fears; but free themselves they cannot, so long as life and conscience lasts. It is a bondage all are subject to.

Let a man be never so great, he is apprehensive of what *death* will bring him to; and if he be never so mean and miserable, he fears the consequence of going to an unknown world.

If we consider it as the *night of that day* which is given us
[John 9. 4.] to work in, and that *when the night cometh no man can work;* how frightful must the thoughts of death be to one who is not prepared for such a change!

And if we consider it as the beginning of eternity, *it is still more dreadful.*

In short, it will make those to tremble, who pretend to
Job 18. 14. fear nothing else. For which reason it is called "The King of Terrors:" and the Psalmist, when he would express the worst
Ps. 55. 4. of evils, saith, "the terrors of death are fallen upon me."

This, no doubt of it, is a very grievous burden. God saw it was so; and out of great compassion, sent His Son to deliver us. And indeed, there is no way of judging so truly of the greatness of our slavery, as by the *manner of our redemption*. That no other deliverer would serve, but the Son of God Himself; that no *Moses* could be found; no *angel*, nor *archangel*, could work this deliverance for us. This is a sure proof that our case was desperate. Here then is our bondage: and I beseech you to consider, whether the slavery of Egypt could possibly be more insupportable?

And will not this make the memory of our great Redeemer ever dear to us; who, by His precious death, hath delivered us from the *guilt of sin*, from the *powers of hell*, and from *the fears of death?* And by His *resurrection* we are *assured* that God accepted of the *price He paid for our redemption.*

But, to be a little more particular upon these three heads.

And *first*, that God is in Christ perfectly reconciled to us,

the Scriptures every where assure us. This was the sum of the Apostles' commission, "To preach repentance and remission of sins in His name." Luke 24.47. "In Him," saith St. Paul, "In Him we have redemption;" that is, the forgiveness of sins. Eph. 1. 7. "The blood of Jesus Christ cleanseth us from all sin;" that is, *upon our repentance;* for we must not imagine, that God, for Christ's sake, will forgive us, if we continue in sin. 1 John 1. 7. St. Paul gives us a very different account of the design of the Gospel, and the end of Christ's sufferings: "He gave Himself for us," saith he, "that He might redeem us from all iniquity, and purify unto Himself a peculiar people zealous of good works." Tit. 2. 14.

Whenever, therefore, we please ourselves with the thoughts of what Jesus Christ has done for us, in obtaining the remission of our sins past, let us always have His words present with us: "Sin no more, lest a worse thing come unto thee." [John 5. 14.]

But, *secondly,* Jesus Christ has not only delivered us from the *guilt,* but also from the *power of sin.* He hath delivered us from the powers of darkness, and translated us into the kingdom of His Father; that is, He has put us under His protection, so that sin or Satan shall not have dominion over us; for by faith in Jesus Christ we shall be able to quench all the fiery darts of the wicked.

Lastly; He has delivered us from the *fear of death,* according to that which was spoken of Him by the Prophet, "I will ransom them from the power of the grave; I will redeem them from death." Hos. 13. 14. "Whether we live, therefore, we live unto the Lord; or whether we die, we die unto the Lord: whether we live, therefore, or die, we are the Lord's: for to this end Christ both died and rose again, and revived, that He might be Lord both of the dead and living." Rom. 14. 8, 9.

The truth is, *the sting of death,* that which makes it truly terrible, *is sin;* if we can but be assured of the *forgiveness of our sins,* death is no longer to be feared; so saith the Spirit expressly, "Blessed are the dead which die in the Lord." [1 Cor. 15. 56.] Rev. 14. 13.

You see therefore, Christians, to whom these mighty favours, these great promises, belong. Even to such as through faith *are made partakers of the divine nature;* such as have *crucified the flesh with its affections and lusts.* To all such, the resurrection of Jesus Christ is an undoubted pledge of [2 Pet. 1. 4; Gal. 5. 24.]

SERM. LXIX.

peace with God, of *security* from the dominion of sin, and of *immortality* to all true believers; that is, to all whose conversation is such as becometh the Gospel of Christ.

But as those Israelites, who, after they were delivered from the bondage of Egypt, rebelled against God and His vicegerent, and were destroyed by sundry kinds of death; as that deliverance was no blessing to them, through their own fault purely, no more will *this* which we *now* commemorate be to *us*, if we set not our affections on things above; if we refuse to follow our Redeemer, "who died for all, that they which live should not live unto themselves, but unto Him which died for them, and rose again."

2 Cor. 5. 15.

And now you see, that if our children, or such as are strangers to our religion, ask us, *what we mean by this service?*—by keeping *this feast* with so much *outward joy* at least, and *solemnity*,—we can tell them with reason, (and oh! that we could tell them from *an holy experience!*)—

That mankind being born of a sinful race, and conversing with others as corrupt as themselves, they became *extremely wicked*, and an *offence* to God that made them; to whom they could make no manner of satisfaction for the transgression of His righteous laws;

That though they were convinced both of the evil of their doings, and the dangers they were subject to, yet they could not avoid those very sins which they foresaw would be their ruin; for being subject to a powerful evil spirit, *and taken captive by him at his will*, they became liable to every wickedness man could be guilty of;

That in the midst of these miseries, the world could afford them neither *help* nor *comfort;* but on the contrary, meeting with *crosses, afflictions, disappointments*, at every turn, they were well assured, *that this was no place of true happiness;* but then they know not how to mend themselves;

And to make their misery complete, *in the midst of this very life*, which they were apt to be fond of, *they were in death;* that is, they saw themselves every day nearer death; and though it might put an end to the miseries of other creatures, yet they feared, and not without reason, that to *them* it might be the beginning of a much worse life than this they complain of.

We should then proceed to tell our children the *manner of our deliverance;* that we, and all mankind, being in these sad circumstances and bondage, Jesus Christ, out of His infinite goodness, undertook to redeem us; and having laid down His life a ransom for us, to assure us that God was pleased with *that price* of our redemption, He *rose again,* as on *this day,* from the dead, giving us this sure pledge of our *own* resurrection, and (if it be not our own fault) to everlasting happiness.

For having obtained the *forgiveness of sins,* for all them that believe in Him, He has taken out the very *sting of death,* which is no longer terrible to them that die in the Lord.

Having overcome the powers of darkness, they can no longer *have dominion* over us, unless we forsake *the Captain of our salvation,* and go over to His enemies; having made known to us *the way of life,* and how we may live so as to please God, we need be no longer fearful of His displeasure.

Lastly; having fully made known to us a much better *life* and *state* than *this,* he has endeavoured to take off our affections from this world, and to place them there where *true, solid, lasting* joys await those that shall be worthy of them.

So that, by possessing our souls with a true sense of these things, we shall be able to propagate our joys, and the reason of them, to all generations to come.

And now, how unpardonable shall we be if we neglect so great means of salvation? How shall many of those condemn us, who lived before these things were accomplished? Whose faith was approved of, because, *though they had not received the promises* as we have done, "yet seeing them afar off, they were persuaded of them, and embraced them, and confessed that they were strangers and pilgrims on the earth." Heb. 11. 13.

What a blessed effect of faith was this! And is it possible to describe the unthoughtfulness of people, to whom God has given a more perfect knowledge of the world to come, and which He has confirmed to *us* after so convincing a manner by the resurrection of Jesus Christ, if we continue to live like *infidels,* who know not what shall become of them when they die? Who therefore want those many motives to *virtue* and *holiness,* which (blessed be God!) *we* plentifully enjoy. For we *certainly know,* "that our labour shall not be in vain in [1 Cor. 15. 58.]

SERM. LXIX.

the Lord;" that "God, who raised up the Lord Jesus, will also raise up us by His own power;" that "if our earthly [1 Cor. 6. 14.] house of this tabernacle be dissolved, we have a building 2 Cor. 5. 1. of God" (provided for us), "an house not made with hands, 1 Pet. 1. 3, 4. eternal in the heavens;" "that we have a lively hope, by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, to an inheritance incorruptible and undefiled, and that fadeth not away;" that, therefore, if our dearest friends are taken away from us by 1 Thess. 4. 13. death, "we ought not to sorrow as those that have no hope;" that if, by the providence of God, we lose our goods, we Heb. 10. 34. should not be over-much concerned, "since we know we have in heaven a better and a more enduring substance;" that if we suffer afflictions, our Lord did so before us; and Rom. 6. 5. that "if we be planted together in the likeness of His death, we shall be also in the likeness of His resurrection."

Heb. 12. 1, 2. "Let us run, therefore, with patience, the race that is set before us, looking unto Jesus the author and finisher of our faith; who, for the joy that was set before Him, endured the cross, despising the shame, and is set down at the right hand of the throne of God."

I said before, that the reason why the Church requires of all her members, who are able to understand these things, that they keep *this service*, which was by Jesus Christ Himself appointed, to preserve the memory of our deliverance until His coming again; that they receive the Lord's Supper at *this time especially*, when these great things were accomplished.

Need I put you in mind again of the *penalty* appointed by God Himself for those that wilfully refused to keep *the passover*, which was but a *type* or *shadow* of this? THAT SOUL SHALL BE CUT OFF. The least that can be meant by that expression is, *that man shall have no benefit by this deliverance;* it shall be no *blessing* to him, whatever it be to others.

Need I tell you what judgments the Israelites brought upon themselves by forgetting their *great deliverance?*

Lastly; need I put you in mind of what the Apostle assures us was the consequence, in his time, of receiving the Lord's Supper, without considering the ends for which it was instituted, and the obligation it laid upon all Christians

to lead holy lives; namely, that God visited them very remarkably for their neglect.

I need only tell you, that these things were written for our example, that we should not follow them in their sin, that we may not share with them in their punishment.

In one word: this is the true Christian sacrifice, without which there is no remission of sins; it was appointed by Jesus Christ Himself to be done in remembrance of His death, until His coming again to judgment. This should, in all reason, put us all in mind of the account we must then give; and to be always endeavouring to prepare ourselves for that great day, which is to determine our condition for ever and ever.

Now, may God grant that at the coming again of our Lord Jesus Christ to judge the quick and the dead, we may have a share in the resurrection of the righteous, through the same Jesus Christ our Lord.

To whom, with the Father and the Holy Ghost, be all honour and glory, now and for ever.

SERMON LXX.

THE RESURRECTION OF JESUS CHRIST OF THE GREATEST IMPORTANCE TO MANKIND.

Acts i. 21, 22.

See Luke 24. 39; Acts 4. 33; 26. 22, 23; Rom. 1. 4; 1 Cor. 15. 4, 14, 20.

Wherefore of these men which have companied with us all the time that the Lord Jesus went in and out among us, [i.e. during the time of His ministry,] *beginning from the baptism of John unto that same day when He was taken up from us, must one be ordained to be a witness with us of His resurrection.*

That our blessed Saviour, in making choice of the *number twelve,* for His Apostles, on whom to build His Church, had respect to the *twelve tribes* of Israel, amongst whom the Church of God had been till that time, there is little reason to doubt. But then that these *twelve* were to be witnesses of *His resurrection,* and that *that* number must of necessity be filled up, for *this purpose,* seems to be spoken with regard to the vast importance of *this truth* especially. It is not said, to be witness with us, of His wonderful miracles, of His most holy life, of His divine doctrine, of His meritorious death, or of His glorious ascension, but *of His resurrection.* There must, I say, be some extraordinary reason, that one must be chosen (to supply the place of Judas) to be a *witness of Christ's resurrection.*

And indeed there is so much stress laid upon this matter of fact, both for establishing the truth of Christianity, and for promoting of true piety (which is the end of Christianity), that the Apostles every where appeal to this article of the Christian faith, both to persuade men to believe the Gospel, as also to live as becomes the Gospel; and they appeal to it, as to a thing in which they could not possibly be deceived.

And to shew that they were indeed sincere, they readily laid down their lives for the truth of what they affirmed; that is, for the truth of what they affirmed *that they themselves had seen and heard.* [Acts 4. 20; 22. 15; 1 John 1. 1, 3.]

It is true, there have been men who have suffered death, rather than renounce a false persuasion which they had embraced; but never man, since the creation, suffered death in defence of a thing which he knew to be untrue.

As then the resurrection of Christ is a matter of fact *of the greatest importance to mankind;* for if He rose from the dead, it *must* be by *the power* of God; and then *God owned Him for His Son;* and consequently He was a *teacher sent from God,* to let the world know what must be hereafter; then whatever He said must be true.

It is for instance, most *certainly true,* as sure *as God is true,* that there is a life after this; that there will also be a judgment after this life; that they that have done good shall go into life everlasting, and they that have done evil into everlasting fire. And consequently, those laws and rules which Jesus Christ has given to men are of divine authority, and by them we shall all *most certainly* be judged at the *last day.*

These, I say, being the consequences of Christ's resurrection, it was necessary, God being *infinitely good and just,* that there should be such a number of witnesses, and such infallible proofs of His resurrection, as should be sufficient to put the truth out of all doubt to men *disposed to receive the truth in sincerity.* Especially, since both *these witnesses* themselves, and *all* that heard and *received their testimony,* were bound to lay down their lives *in defence of this truth.*

Observe then *the steps* which our blessed Lord took to establish this truth, and to leave those that would not believe it *without excuse, and without hopes of mercy.*

And first; He assured His disciples, "that as Jonas was three days and three nights in the whale's belly;" which was a sufficient proof of Jonas' being sent from God, for it was certainly known to the Ninevites; "so shall the Son of Man be three days in the heart of the earth." Matt. 12. 39, 40.

But lest His disciples should not understand this way of speaking, He tells them at another time plainly, "The Son Mark 9. 31.

SERM. LXX.

of Man is delivered into the hands of men, and they shall kill Him; and after that He is killed, He shall rise the third day."

John 14. 29. And again, speaking of the same subject, he adds, "And now I have told you before it come to pass, that when it is come to pass ye might believe;" that is, that ye may know for certain, *that ye are not imposed upon,* either by your own senses, or by the malice of evil spirits, when ye shall see Me again; "for, as sure as ye see Me now, ye shall see Me after I am risen from the dead."

And according to this prediction, He (after that by wicked hands He had been put to death) the very third day *shewed Himself alive to His Apostles, by many infallible proofs;* and

Acts 1. 3. after that conversed with them *for forty days together;* "speaking of the things pertaining unto the kingdom of God;"

1 Cor. 15. 6. during which time "He appeared unto five hundred of His disciples at one time;" and so as to convince them, to leave them without any doubt of the truth of His resurrection. For otherwise the holy writers would have plainly told the whole truth, as they have done in the case of St. Thomas. They tell us, for instance, that he *would not believe,* unless he might have such proofs as *he himself* should think sufficient; he would not take the testimony of ten men, of whose honesty he had had sufficient experience, but he would be convinced

John 20. 25. after his *own way,* or else he would still be an infidel. "Except," saith he, "I shall see in His hands the print of the nails, and put my finger into the print of the nails, and thrust my hand into His side, I will not believe."

No infidel on earth could be more positive, or could require more particular proofs, than one of Christ's own Apostles. But then he did not persist in his unbelief, when our Lord had condescended to satisfy him after his own heart's desire; for it seems he had not, by other wickednesses, filled up the measure of his sins: and his Lord, who knew what instruments of good both he and St. Peter were like to be, was graciously pleased to pass by the infirmities of His servants; and this doubting Apostle became one of those twelve witnesses of Christ's resurrection, by whose evidence the whole Christian world has been established in the truth of this *most important article of the Christian faith.*

And if there have been people in all ages, who have not been persuaded by *their* testimony, they are such (our Lord Himself has said it), they are such as "would not be persuaded though one rose from the dead," as often as they are pleased to call in question any received truth of the Christian religion; being such as either will not be at pains to consider these proofs; or such as have provoked God to leave them to themselves, by giving way to, and entertaining, unnecessary doubts; or lastly, they are such as, by consenting to known iniquity, have made it their interest not to believe any thing which must make them uneasy; and for that reason they bribe their understandings, *as the Jews did the watch,* to own a falsehood rather than believe the truth. [Luke 16. 31.]

But indeed it is now too late to make objections, and raise scruples, when the most *interested wit,* and *inveterate malice,* of the Jewish rulers, when these things happened, could not stop the world from embracing this truth.

And if you ask why did not *they* believe? The answer is short; *they were not disposed to receive the truth,* or out of desperate madness, they would not own, what they could not but suspect was true, because they must *then* have owned *that they had been the betrayers and murderers of the Son of God.* Whereas a much less crime will, at this day, hinder wicked men from confessing the truth, if it is their worldly interest to deny what they know and have reason to believe is true.

Now, add to all these proofs, that God did ratify the testimony of these twelve Apostles, by enabling them to work miracles, for confirmation of *this very truth; for with great power,* that is, with mighty signs and wonders, *gave the Apostles witness of the resurrection of the Lord Jesus;* God Himself setting, as it were, His seal to *their testimony;* which had this effect, that the Gospel, wherever this truth was preached, was received by all sorts of people. Well therefore might St. Luke say, that by *many infallible proofs* the resurrection of Christ was made known to the Apostles, and by them to the whole world. [Acts 4. 33.]

And now, good Christians, you see upon what undeniable grounds this article of the Christian faith is founded; and I have set them in order before you, that your faith may be confirmed, and that I may from hence have an occasion of

SERM. LXX.

shewing you, how a firm belief of *this truth* may become *a principle of life* to every one that believeth.

I observed to you before, that by the resurrection of Christ from the dead, the doctrine of the Gospel is established beyond *any possibility of doubting*, provided men are disposed to receive the truth; particularly, we are not *now* to doubt whether or not our souls are immortal; whether they live when the body is dead. It is plain our Saviour's soul did so, and was again united to His body.

We are not *now* to make it a question, whether there will be *a judyment to come?* Whether there are *rewards* and *punishments* hereafter, as men shall have behaved themselves here? Whether *repentance*, and an *holy life*, are not absolutely necessary to salvation?

These are truths *as certain now*, as that there is a God. And the manner of making them plain to the very meanest capacity will leave all men, who shall hear of these things, without excuse, if they shall not order their lives accordingly. This, therefore, I shall not insist upon any farther; but what I would now desire you to consider, are these following things:

First; that the great care and pains which the Holy Ghost has taken to put *this matter* out of all doubt, shews *the great importance thereof* to mankind. And indeed, it is the *foundation of our faith;* it is by *this* we know certainly, that the Christian religion is of God; it is the foundation of all our hopes of "an inheritance incorruptible and undefiled, and that fadeth not away." It is the only support of Christians in the midst of *the many changes and chances of this mortal life.* And lastly, it is the great blessing we have in exchange for the loss of an everlasting life, which we forfeited when our first parents broke through the commands of God; for ever since that time, *all mankind have, all their life long, been subject to bondage through the fear of death,* until Jesus Christ brought *life and immortality to light,* as well as purchased them for His otherwise miserable creatures. For by His resurrection (having taken our nature upon Him) He has assured us, that although God has passed the sentence of death upon us for our transgression, yet for Christ's sake, He will restore us to a much better

1 Pet. 1. 3, 4.

[Heb. 2.15; 2Tim.1.10.]

life, provided we will submit to the conditions He requires of us in order to obtain it.

"He was" (saith St. Paul) "delivered to death for our offences, and raised again for our justification;" that is, as a plain proof that God accepted of His death as a full satisfaction for the sins of all those whose nature He took upon Him; that is, for the sins of the whole world. Rom. 4. 25.

Now God having, in this instance, given the world the most certain and convincing proof of the truth of Christianity, men are obliged, at their utmost peril, not only to *embrace it*, as the only means of recovering the favour of God, but of *living* as becomes the Gospel of Christ, since that is the only way of qualifying themselves for eternal happiness. So that there is now no choice left but *this:* "He that believeth and is baptized, shall be saved; and he that believeth not shall be damned." Mark 16.16.

People may *argue*, and *hope*, and *fancy*, as they please; but as sure as Jesus Christ rose from the dead, (and you have seen what infallible proofs there are of that,) *this*, and *this* only, will be the issue of *believing*, or *not believing* the Gospel; to wit, *eternal happiness*, or *eternal misery*.

II. The next thing, therefore, which I would recommend to your serious consideration is *this:* that there is an effectual power which goes along with a hearty belief of this article of the Christian faith, and which is plainly experienced by those that have embraced it sincerely.

The Apostle desires, above all things, that he may know *Christ and the power of His resurrection;* which will enable such as believe it heartily to raise themselves from the death of sin unto the life of righteousness, by rooting out all the vices of our nature, and planting in their room such virtues as are absolutely necessary to fit us for heaven and happiness. Phil. 3. 10.

There is no Christian who has seriously considered, and has attempted to master the corruptions of his nature, but has found, to his sorrow, that it is the most difficult thing in the world to break off evil habits; so very difficult, that as one expresses it[a], "It is easier to take a dagger, and

[a] Dr. Henry More's Life, p. 114.

SERM. LXX.

strike it into one's heart, than thoroughly and resolvedly to deny the lusts and practices one has been accustomed to."

Who then would not despair of ever subduing the corruptions of nature and custom, if the same hand which raised up Jesus our Lord from the dead had not promised to help all such as flee to Him for succour? So necessary is the knowledge and belief of this truth.

But then it must not be a *bare knowledge;* nor is it enough to profess (though one should profess it every day) that Jesus Christ was raised from the dead by the power of God, unless we believe, and are persuaded, that the same power which conquered death and hell will assist us to overcome all our evil and corrupt affections, provided we pray earnestly for His grace, depend upon His love, and use our best endeavours to please Him. Then may we promise ourselves victory over all the corruptions which by nature we are subject to, while we disclaim all self-confidence, and put our whole trust in God, who raiseth the dead.

III. The next thing which offers itself to our consideration, from the *certainty of Christ's resurrection,* is *the certainty of a life to come,* and a life of endless happiness to all such as receive and obey His Gospel.

[2 Cor. 5. 1; 4. 16; Rev. 14. 13.]

"We know," saith the Apostle, "that if our earthly house of this tabernacle were dissolved, we have a building of God, a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens. For which cause we faint not." "Blessed, therefore, are the dead which die in the Lord;" and blessed are they that are alive, who live unto God, who love Him, and keep His commandments. For all such, our Lord Christ is gone to prepare a place, that where He is, there they may be also; where there shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain.

[2 Cor. 7. 1.]

Having therefore these promises, dearly beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God, that at last we may be meet partakers of the inheritance of the saints in heaven.

IV. You see, good Christians, what little reason we have to be over-solicitous for our bodies and the things of this world. Look unto Jesus Christ, *before* and *after His resurrection;* He, that while He lived, was a man of sorrows, and

acquainted with grief; whom the world *despised, hated, persecuted,* and at last *crucified;* yet, being for His obedience beloved of God, was raised by Him the *third day from the dead;* and then, that body which had so lately been torn and mangled by all the ways that malice or cruelty could invent, is now no longer subject to want or misery. The scourges that had plowed His back but three days before, the crown of thorns that had pierced His temples, and the nails and spear that wounded Him so unmercifully, did not in the least hinder that body from being raised in glory. And this, the Spirit of God assures us, shall be the reward of every faithful member of Jesus Christ. "This corruptible body shall put on incorruption, and this mortal body shall put on immortality;" and we shall no longer be sensible of the inconveniences of this life, nor remember the hardships we may have met with in this vale of misery. [1 Cor. 15. 53.]

So that you see, that we may want a great many things which the world doats on, and suffer a great many things which flesh and blood cannot easily digest, and yet be very happy after death.

And though such as are at ease and secure, at least in their own opinion, from fear of evil, may not be much affected with these considerations, yet there are, no doubt of it, millions, who, in the midst of their afflictions, do bless God for giving them *this earnest, this assurance,* of a better life after death.

To conclude then the whole: *I may,* good Christians, every return of this season, put you in mind of these things, and *you* may hear them with *pleasure,* and neither you nor I be the better, unless we can be persuaded to lay them very seriously to heart; unless the belief of *the resurrection of the body* incline us to mortify the deeds of the flesh, to make our bodies fit temples of the Holy Ghost; unless we can, by this consideration, be persuaded to set our affections above, not on things on the earth, where we profess to be strangers and pilgrims; to have no abiding place, no inheritance, on this side the grave.

How infinitely does it concern every Christian here present to lay these things to heart! Death is not far from every one of us: that very moment we shall enter upon eter-

SERM. LXX.

nity. And is it not the interest and concern of every man to have hope in his death; to look beyond the grave with some comfortable assurance, that when God shall raise the dead, and judge the world by Jesus Christ, He will change our vile bodies, that they may be like unto His glorious body, that we may be happy both in body and soul?

[Phil. 3. 20, 21.]

Now, nothing but a *good life*, which is the consequence of a *sound faith*, can give any man this comfortable hope, and free him from the fears of what may come hereafter, without which *the doctrine of the resurrection* will yield us no great comfort. But then this is altogether our own fault: the omnipotent hand of God, which raised our Lord from the dead, is ready to help all such as apply to Him for health and salvation, to raise them from death unto life, both here and hereafter.

[Heb. 13. 20, 21.]

Now the God of peace, that brought again from the dead our Lord Jesus Christ, that great Shepherd of the sheep, through the blood of the everlasting covenant, make us perfect in every good work, to do His will, working in us that which is well-pleasing in His sight, through Jesus Christ; to Whom be glory, for ever and ever.

SERMON LXXI.

EASTER.

THE KNOWLEDGE AND BELIEF OF THE RESURRECTION OF JESUS CHRIST A NECESSARY ENCOURAGEMENT TO FORSAKE SIN.

EPH. ii. 4, 5.

But God, who is rich in mercy, for His great love wherewith He loved us, even when we were dead in sins, hath quickened us together with Christ, &c.

See John 5. 24, 25; 11. 25; Rom. 5. 6; 6. 4; Eph. 2. 1; 5. 14; Col. 2. 13; 1 John 3. 14; Rev. 20. 6.

THE RESURRECTION OF THE BODY is that article of our Christian faith, which the Church does, *at this time,* recommend to our meditation. And that we may receive it with all assurance, the resurrection of Christ is set before us in such circumstances as are sufficient to convince all such as are willing to be convinced, that CHRIST IS RISEN FROM THE DEAD, AND BECOME THE FIRST-FRUITS OF THEM THAT SLEEP IN HIM. [1 Cor. 15. 20.]

And indeed, it was necessary that Christ's resurrection should be ascertained, beyond any reasonable exception, to men who were to lay down their lives for affirming the truth of it. He therefore told His disciples, before He suffered, that He was to suffer, "and that after three days He would rise again." "I tell you before it come, that when it is come to pass, ye may believe that I am He." A way of reasoning which our Saviour made use of on many occasions, and therefore thought it a sufficient argument. Mark 9. 31. John 13. 19.

And so did His disciples: for after they had seen Him when He was risen, and He had given them all the satisfaction their scruples could suggest; and especially after He had sent down the Holy Ghost, (according to His true promise,) to supply His place on earth, by which *they* were enabled to work the same miracles which He Himself had done

SERM. LXXI.

when amongst them: this was *to them* a sure argument that the hand of God was in all this; that Jesus Christ was the beloved Son of God; that they had not been deceived in any thing that He had *said,* or *done,* or *told* them. For they were very sure that God could not give *His* testimony to a lie, or require them to lay down their lives for an untruth. And therefore, when they affirmed, "that Jesus Christ was risen from the dead," they only said what they knew for certain, what all their senses assured them of; and therefore they did not stick to seal the truth of it *with their own blood.*

Thus the belief of the resurrection was established. But for what end? Was it only to convince us that we shall be raised from the dead? Why, truly, so we may, without being
Dan. 12. 2. the better for it. For the Spirit of God tells us, "that they that sleep in the dust shall wake, some to everlasting life, and some to shame and everlasting contempt." So that, in truth, the resurrection of the body is like to be no blessing to such as shall rise only to be for ever miserable.

The knowledge and belief of the resurrection of Jesus Christ, therefore, is necessary upon another account; namely, to con-
Eph. 1. 19. vince us "of the exceeding greatness of the power of God to us-ward that believe;" that we may be encouraged to forsake all our evil ways, and to overcome the corruption of our nature; since we have a power to assist us which is able to raise our dead bodies, and therefore to whom nothing is impossible.

[Eph. 2. 4, 5.] "God, who is rich in mercy, even when we were dead in sins, hath quickened us together with Christ." In which words, a great many very important truths are contained or implied.

First; that there is a *death of the soul* as well as *of the body.*

Secondly; that *sin is the death of the soul,* and, consequently, *righteousness is its life.*

Thirdly; that there must be *a spiritual resurrection,* or else the soul will remain under the power of everlasting death.

Fourthly; that *this spiritual resurrection* can only be wrought by the mighty power of God, answerable to that which raised up Jesus our Lord from the dead.

And the conclusion of the whole will be,—*Fifthly;* that

it is through *faith in this power*, that a sinner is raised from the *death of sin unto the life of righteousness*.

And these are the particulars, which I pray God I may explain to your and to my own edification.

I. And first, you will observe, *that there is a death of the soul as well as of the body*. St. Paul tells us of those that live in pleasures, "they are dead while they live." The father saith of his prodigal son, "this my son was dead, and is alive again." The sacred Scriptures speak of wicked men, *as past feeling;* that is, having no sense of good or evil, no more than if they were dead; *as being in darkness;* not knowing whither they are going, or what will become of them. Nay, as being actually dead—"Even you being dead in your sins," saith the Apostle.

1 Tim. 5. 6. Luke 15. 24. [Col. 2. 13.]

Now, all these expressions are made use of to convince us of this truth, that the soul is subject to death as well as the body; or rather, that the very natural state of the soul, since the fall, is a *state of death*. For we are not able of ourselves to do any thing for which we were created.

We can neither love God who made us, nor fear Him, though He can make us miserable; though happiness is *set before us, offered to us, pressed upon us,* yet we value it no more than a dead man does dainties.

God publisheth His laws, threatens those that shall break them, executes His judgments upon transgressors; and yet people are as insensible, and as secure, as if there were neither God nor danger.

It is for this reason, and because that men in this condition are not able to help themselves, that the Scripture speaks of men in their natural state, as of those that are dead—dead to all the purposes for which they were created.

II. And now, if we consider what has occasioned this great disorder, we shall find, that *sin,* and *sin* only, has done it. "By *sin,*" saith St. Paul, "*death* entered into the world;" not only natural, but *spiritual death*. And *this* is what we are most concerned to *know* and to *lay to heart;* for if we continue in a state of death, which sin has brought us into, we shall be for ever miserable without redemption. We shall neither *foresee* nor fear any evil, till it will be too late to prevent it.

Rom. 5. 12.

SERM. LXXI.

We have too many examples of this before our eyes continually, of people who are as little concerned for what may be their lot hereafter, as those are who are *in their graves.* They confess that they are sinners, and yet are not sensible of any danger. They are told, that GOD, "who can destroy both body and soul in hell," is their enemy, and yet they mind it not.

Matt. 10. 28.]

Such is the bewitching nature of sin, to those that are under the dominion of it, that it makes a man *careless* of his true interest; *blind* so that he cannot see before him; nay, as *dead* to all the purposes for which God made him, as if he had neither breath nor life.

And this is the condition of every man by nature; *this* is what *sin* has brought upon us. And it is fit we should know it, that when the Spirit of God awakens us, and raiseth us from the death of sin, we may be thankful for the mercy; not resist His dealings with us, but be ever after fearful of falling again into that sad state.

III. And this brings us to a *third particular,* which I proposed to explain to you. And that was *the spiritual resurrection,* without which the soul *must* remain in a state of eternal death. And here I am very sensible that I must say very many things which many that hear me will not at all understand.

There are carnal Christians, (as well as there were carnal Jews,) who, when they hear of *rising from the dead,* think of nothing but of the death and resurrection of the body.

Now, the death of the body is soon over. It is *eternal death* that we ought to be most concerned to escape. And in order to this, the soul is to be raised from the death of sin unto a life of righteousness, or else both will be miserable. This is what the holy Scripture presses upon us in very many places; "Awake thou that sleepest, and arise from the dead, and Christ shall give thee light." Blessed and holy is he that hath part in the *first resurrection;* that is, from the death of sin. "If ye then be risen with Christ, seek those things which are above."

[Eph. 5. 14.] [Rev. 20. 6.]

Col. 3. 1.

In short; this is the end of all religion: to restore men to the likeness and similitude of God, from which they are fallen.

But, that you may better understand what is meant by a

spiritual resurrection, I must put you in mind of the condition we are in, and how we came into this condition.

Man was *at first* created *in the image* of God, in righteousness and true holiness; that is, he was able to act conformably to any law which God would think fit to give him. We are very sure that it is not so now with us. The holy Scriptures, *and they only,* can inform us how this came to pass; and they tell us, that man being thus created, there was a covenant of life immortal made with him, by which his natural appetites being restrained, he might the better improve himself in all virtue, until God should think fit to translate him from earth to heaven. Gen. 2. 16.

Now man having *free will,* and consequently a power of choosing *evil* as well as *good,* instead of *improving* in virtue, he gave way to his appetites, he broke the covenant, by which he and his posterity became subject to sin and death; for the Spirit of God forsook him, and instead of an immortal race, we are assured "that he begat a son after his own image," not after the image of God, "but in his *own* likeness;" that is, with such a corrupt and depraved nature as his own was *now* become. Gen. 5. 3.

Now, that this is the very condition of all the posterity of Adam, is plain from experience. And we are so far departed from *original righteousness,* that we are utterly incapable of conforming to *any the most reasonable law* that God has set us. And those that think that reason is sufficient to lead us to, and keep us in the right way, are guilty of a *double error.*

They suppose, for example, *First,* that men are generally governed by reason, whereas they are rather governed by their passions. *Secondly,* they must suppose, that men are capable of attending constantly to what is fit to be done. Now it is found by experience, that they *are not;* that we do not always follow the dictates of our understanding; and that we violate laws which we are *convinced* are good.

We must, therefore, take the Scripture account of our *fall,* of our *weakness,* of our *blindness,* of our utter incapacity of being restored to the image of God, by any thing we can do.

For *this* is the *spiritual resurrection* we are speaking of, and without which God can take no pleasure in us, until *His image, His likeness,* is recovered in the soul; that is, "until Gal. 4. 19.

SERM. LXXI.

Christ be formed within us;" until we have got the mastery over our *corrupt affections*, so as not to be led by them; until we delight in doing that which is good; until the love of God become a law to us.

This, I say, is the *spiritual resurrection;* this is the life of righteousness, to which we must be restored before we leave this world, or we shall remain under the power of *everlasting death, of everlasting misery.*

IV. But how is this to be effected? Why, *only by the mighty power of God, answerable to that which raised up Jesus our Lord from the dead.* "God, who is rich in mercy, for the great love wherewith He loved us, even when we were dead in sins, has quickened us together with Him, and has raised us up together." For He that raised up Jesus from the dead can restore whom He will to life, whether they be dead in a *natural* or in a *spiritual* sense.

[Eph. 2. 4, 5.]

In order to *this*, every Christian has the earnest of the Spirit given him in baptism, even the same Spirit that raised up Christ from the dead. But forasmuch as we are to be dealt with as reasonable creatures, and are not to be carried to heaven against our will, therefore we have *this* rule given us; to him that hath, (that is, who hath made use of the grace of God,) he shall have still more grace; and from him that hath not made use of God's grace, from *him* shall be taken what he had at first.

[Matt. 13. 12.]

This shews the reason why some, notwithstanding the earnest of God's Spirit, continue still amongst the dead, whilst others are raised to life and happiness.

This shews the necessity of applying constantly to God for new supplies of grace, as well as for pardon of the sins we commit, which might otherwise provoke Him to withdraw His Spirit from us.

Lastly; this shews the necessity of walking warily, lest Satan get an advantage over us, and bring us back into a state of sin and death.

In short; it is God that worketh in us both to *will*, and to *do*, of His own good pleasure.

But then He expects, when He has wrought in us *this will*, and given us a power; He then requires of us, *that we should work out our own salvation with fear and trembling;*

[Phil. 2. 12.]

that is, with a concern suitable to the work we are about. He requires, for instance, that we should do what we *can*, and that we should be *sincere*.

Our outward actions are generally in our own power. I cannot perhaps, all at once, cure myself of envy, but I can speak well of people, and I *can* too take care not to speak ill of them. I cannot serve God with that love and devotion He requires, but I can attend His service, I can hear His word, I can speak of Him with reverence. My own conscience tells me, that this is in my own power; and when I do this out of a sense of duty, I may depend upon it, God will give me those good dispositions which I wished for, and in order to obtain *which*, I performed that external righteousness before spoken of.

But I have reserved, to the *last place*, that which of all others is the most *powerful* and *effectual* means of recovering the image of God in us; of raising us from the death of sin unto the life of righteousness: and that is,

V. *A stedfast faith in the power of God, which raised up Jesus our Lord from the dead.*

For, in the resurrection of Christ, the omnipotence of God is set before us in the most lively manner. And Christians are exhorted to have their eye on *this* more especially; "That like as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life." [Rom. 6. 4.] Or, as St. Peter expresses it, "That we may be begotten again to a lively hope by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead:" 1 Pet. 1. 3. for nothing is impossible to Him who can raise the dead.

And no man who sincerely believes this article can, without great hypocrisy, say—I would be better if I could, but I am not able to overcome my corruptions. What, not by *His* assistance who raised up Christ from the dead?

Let us rather take shame to ourselves, and confess, that we have no mind to be reformed, or to have the image of God restored in us; for God (you confess with your own mouth) is *able* to do it. And there cannot be a greater assurance given us that He is *willing, than by the resurrection of Christ.* For by *that* we are assured, that God is reconciled to His poor creatures, for whom Christ died, provided

SERM. LXXI.

they will be reconciled to the means which *He* has appointed for their recovery.

Now, matters being thus, as indeed they are, a sinner may with some heart *set about his conversion.* He knows he is *dead;* but God can raise the dead to life again. He cannot help himself; but he can ask help of One that is mighty to save. He meets still with new difficulties in the way of his recovery; but he knows, that God is faithful, who will not suffer us to be tempted above what we are able to bear. In short; if a man is sincere, he knows for certain, that the same power and goodness which raised him from the death of sin, can and will preserve him to eternal life, if he is not wanting to himself.

So that neither his own natural weakness, nor the power of his adversaries, nor the difficulties he is to undergo, nor the miscarriages he is guilty of, ought to discourage him, since his hope is in God, who raiseth the dead.

But then, if his faith and hope be in God, he must follow God's directions, and make use of that power which God gives him to work out his salvation with fear and trembling; and then his faith will not fail him, but will most certainly restore him to the image of God, which consists in righteousness and true holiness, and which is the life of the soul, and without which the soul must be eternally miserable.

This, good Christians, is *the spiritual resurrection,* without which the belief of the resurrection of the body will be a very *uncomfortable article.*

Here is life and death set before us. The death of our bodies *cannot* be prevented by all our care. However, Jesus Christ having conquered death, and having taken away its sting, death cannot be very terrible to any Christian who has reason to hope for a blessed resurrection.

Well then, since we *cannot* escape *temporal death,* our great concern ought to be, that by the grace of God we may escape *eternal death.*

And this is the end and design of religion. And few people can be easy without so much religion as they hope will make them happy when they die.

In the mean time, it is not so well considered as it should be, that all religion is *vain,* which does not *renew us in the*

spirit of our mind; which does not restore us to the image of God, in which man was at first created.

We may receive the Gospel, and we may pretend to believe it: yes; just as the generality of the Jews did the law of Moses. They were circumcised, they kept the Passover, they offered sacrifices as the law appointed, and by these things they hoped to be justified, that is, accepted of God. This was *their* righteousness, of which our Saviour says expressly, that if *our* righteousness does not exceed *theirs,* we can by no means enter into the kingdom of heaven.

Pray, let us consider in what our righteousness does exceed *theirs:* Do we love God more sincerely than *they* did? Do we strive to glorify Him in our lives? Do we live in a humble dependence upon Him, without murmuring, as they did, at His dispensations? Are we more obedient to our governors? Is our conversation such as becomes the Gospel of Christ? Do we find a principle in our minds which obliges us to do (and that willingly) whatever we believe will please God, and to avoid whatever we suspect will offend Him? If it be thus with us, why then *we have passed from death unto life;* the new man is raised up in us, and the Spirit of God is fitting us for a blessed eternity. [1 John 3. 14.]

But if we only mind the letter of the Gospel, and satisfy ourselves with observing its outward ordinances; if we pray out of custom only, and go to the Lord's Table, because we would not be singular; if we do not become thereby more holy in our lives, better men, better neighbours, better Christians; why then we are still in darkness, in the very shadow of death, in the very way to destruction.

You see then, good Christians, that as ever we hope for a *blessed resurrection,* we must first *pass from death unto life here.* He that has not a share in this *first resurrection,* will have but little comfort in the hopes of the second.

Now, the devil will endeavour to divert you from setting about, and going through this necessary work, *by two very contrary methods:* either he will try to make you *presumptuous and careless,* by representing it as the easiest thing in the world; or to make you *despair,* by representing it to be a work far above your ability.

Now, our blessed Lord's *death* and *resurrection* has a

SERM. LXXI.

sanctifying power to cure us both of *presumption* and *despair*.

If a Christian thinks with himself: God is very merciful, I will depend upon His goodness; Christ died for me, I am called by His name, I have been often at His table, He gives me liberty to call God my Father, and as such I pray to Him; why should I not be confident of my future happiness? I will tell you why you should not. Because our Lord Himself saith, that many (at the day of judgment) will have all this to say for themselves, and yet *He will not own them.* And pray consider, that if sin is so harmless a thing, and so very easy to be mastered, why did Christ undergo such agonies, such conflicts, in subduing it?

And if you fancy that *now* Christ requires nothing of us, pray why do His Apostles speak so much of mortification and self-denial, of taking the cross, of crucifying the flesh, nay, of dying to sin? Do you think there is nothing like *this* to be undergone by a Christian before Christ is formed in him: before he riseth from the death of sin unto the life of righteousness? You will be sadly mistaken, if you think so. Hear what St. Paul saith, "Jesus Christ gave Himself for us;" but to what end? Why, "that He might deliver us from this present evil world; that He might redeem us from our vain conversation; that we, being dead unto sin, might live unto God; that He might purify unto Himself a peculiar people zealous of good works."

Gal. 1. 4.

[1 Pet. 1. 18; Rom. 6. 11; Tit. 2. 14.]

When you consider this, you will be convinced that Christianity is a very serious thing; and that Christians have something to do, besides performing a bare outward part in religion.

But then, some people are naturally serious and thoughtful; and these the wicked spirit does often tempt to despair, by setting before them *the difficulties of a Christian life:* that it is impossible to overcome our corruptions; that it is to no purpose to set about it; and if the whole world lieth in wickedness, what hopes have *we* to get free of it? Why, we have an Almighty power ready to help us; the same power which raised Jesus Christ from the dead: nothing can be impossible or difficult to *Him* who could do *that*.

But if it be really so, (you will say,) *Why are there few*

that be saved? Why, because they *will not* go unto Christ that they may have life; they *will not* believe, because they *will not* part with their sins.

But may I be sure that His goodness will receive one who has so much offended Him?

Why, do you think that *that divine Shepherd*, who with so much care and pains sought His lost sheep, and laid it on His shoulders, that *He* will refuse one that cries after Him, and moans to be taken care of? [Luke 15. 5.]

Do you think that He would lay down His life for His sheep, and after that neglect them, and suffer them to be devoured by wolves?

Hear what the Prophet Isaiah saith of this good Shepherd, so long before His incarnation: "He shall feed His flock like a shepherd; He shall gather the lambs with His arm, and carry them in His bosom, and shall gently lead those that are with young." Isa. 40. 11.

Here then is our comfort: if while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us; if while we were enemies we were reconciled to God by the death of His Son, much more being reconciled, we shall be saved by His life, since He now ever liveth to make intercession for us. [Rom. 5. 8, 10; Heb. 7. 25.]

Now, thanks be to God, Who giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ. To Whom be glory and honour, now and for ever. *Amen.* [1 Cor. 15. 57.]

SERMON LXXII.

THE FAITH OF ABRAHAM ILLUSTRATED, AND PRACTICALLY APPLIED.

HEB. xi. 8.

By faith Abraham, when he was called to go out into a place which he should after receive for an inheritance, obeyed; and he went out, not knowing whither he went.

THERE would be but little comfort in believing that there will be a resurrection of the dead, if at the same time there were no possibility of knowing whether we shall be happy or miserable in the life to come. And therefore, as soon as *life* and *immortality* were brought to light by the Gospel, and men were assured that they were to rise again, it was at the same time made known to them, by what means they might provide for, and live in a comfortable hope of a blessed resurrection.

And because the Jews, to whom the Gospel was first preached, did very well know the life and behaviour of their father Abraham, and how acceptable he was to God, the faith of Abraham is often commended in the New Testament, and proposed to *them*, and to all Christians, to be imitated, as the only way to be secure of the favour of God in this world, and in the world to come; without which, life itself, *to a thoughtful man*, would be a burden, and the knowledge of a life to come an insupportable burden.

Now, the case of Abraham, as it is represented in the text, was this: he was commanded by God (in order to preserve him from idolatry), to leave his kindred and his father's house; and God, at the same time, promised *to bless him, and to make him a great nation.* Accordingly he went forth, out of his own country, *not knowing whither he went*, but he

Gen. 12. 1, 2.

was "fully persuaded that what God had promised, He was able also to perform." He therefore cast his whole care upon God, resolving to obey Him *in every thing*, by which faith he became dear to, and was called *the Friend of God.* [Rom. 4. 21.] [James 2. 23.]

Now this, as the Apostle saith expressly, "was written for our sake, to whom the like faith shall be imputed for righteousness, if we believe in Him who raised up Jesus our Lord from the dead." [Rom. 4. 24.]

A thoughtful man can hardly read this account of Abraham, without observing, that this is the case of all good men who live and die in the true faith and fear of God. They know not what shall befall them while they live; they know not the place whither they go when they die; and yet, depending upon the promise of God in Jesus Christ, they leave their country, their friends, their estates, and their very bodies, and go cheerfully into an unknown world, in hopes of a blessed resurrection, and a better inheritance.

Do people then consider what they do, when they neglect to know and to possess their hearts with *saving faith?* Or do *they* consider the mischief they do, who make this grace more difficult to be understood than God designed; hindering the greatest part of mankind from rightly apprehending *that*, without which it is impossible to please God?

Since then there will be a resurrection both of the just and unjust; since the belief of this cannot but be very afflicting where men are destitute of *saving faith;* and since the doctrine of the resurrection is a most comfortable article to all such *as have believed, and are careful to maintain good works;* it will be very proper to consider the nature of that faith by which this doctrine may be applied to the consciences of all sorts of hearers; that such as think of the resurrection, and a life to come, with fear, may know the reason of it, and how to make their minds easy, and their condition safe; that such as hope well for themselves may know whether they have reason to be secure and cheerful;—and, lastly, that such as are indifferent and live at all adventures may be convinced, that although the happiness of man depends upon his faith, yet the not believing the truths of the Gospel will not make these truths void. For instance: we *shall* all rise from the dead, and appear before the judg- [Acts 24. 15; Tit. 8.] [2 Cor. 5. 10.]

SERM. LXXII.

ment-seat of Christ, though all the world should resolve not to believe this.

That these things may be made as plain as may be to your understandings, I will endeavour,

First; to give you a short and *practical* account of faith, as it is contained in the holy Scriptures.

Secondly; to shew that this is that very faith which made Abraham so dear to God, and was imputed unto Him for righteousness, and will be so imputed to us, if we believe on Him who raised up Jesus our Lord from the dead.

Lastly; we shall consider, how the doctrine of the resurrection may *by this faith* be applied to the consciences of all men, in order to *comfort*, to *amend*, or to *awaken* them, as their case requires.

I. FAITH, then, is a *firm* assent to whatever God has revealed,—that is, made known to us,—*for this reason*, because it is from God.

Now, the last way God was pleased to take to make Himself and His will known to us, and to leave all men to whom the Gospel has been preached without excuse, was *this:* He sent His only Son into the world to take our nature upon Him; who, to convince us that He came from God, did such things as none but God can do; He healed the sick; He gave sight to the blind; He raised the dead to life again; and all this with a word of His mouth. And lastly, having suffered Himself to be put to death, He rose the third day from the dead.

[John 16. 30.] By all which He gave sufficient proof, *that He came forth from God;* and that the doctrine which He taught *was of God.* And all such *as with all their heart* believe the truths which He taught *as coming from God*, have that faith which is sufficient for their salvation.

The most necessary truths which He delivered are *these:*

1 Tim. 2. 4. *First; that God would have all men to be saved.* So that there is no room left for any man living to doubt of God's good-will towards him.

Secondly; that He will require a strict account of men according to the favours He has bestowed upon them; they must therefore expect to be dealt with *in justice*, and not hope for favour where He has not promised to shew mercy.

Thirdly; that notwithstanding this, men have no reason to be discouraged, because God will be pleased with what we can do, if we do it in sincerity; that is, with a desire of pleasing God to the best of our power. He has therefore declared, that in the first place, *we should not sin;* but because even they that mean well may be overtaken and fall into sin, He has therefore provided a remedy for that: "If any man sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous; and He is the propitiation for our sins." That is, God, for Christ's sake, will be reconciled to those that have not done their duty, *upon their true repentance.* More than this the heart of man should not desire. 1 John 2. 1, 2.

Fourthly; and because the more *thoughtful* men are, the more sensible they are of their own weakness and inability to do what is required of them, in order to their eternal happiness, God has promised that His Holy Spirit shall assist such as desire to work out their own salvation. Phil. 2. 12.

And *lastly;* to make us mind these things more carefully, He has made known to us thus much of the state after death: "All that are in the graves shall come forth; they that have done good, unto the resurrection of life; and they that have done evil, unto the resurrection of damnation." John 5. 28, 29.

Now, to believe these things, because God has made them known to us, is called FAITH. But then we are to consider, that one may believe all this without any manner of advantage. "The devils believe, and tremble." Simon Magus believed the Apostle's words. Even at the great day many will say unto Jesus Christ, *Have we not preached in Thy name?* [James 2. 19; Acts 8. 13; Matt. 7. 22.]

Therefore, *saving faith* is such a belief of these things as makes a man live so as if he *did indeed* believe them. "For faith," (saith St. James ii. 17,) "without works, is dead." For instance: I believe that God will pardon *all such as with hearty repentance and true faith turn unto Him;* but then this faith will stand me in no stead, if, notwithstanding I know this, I neglect to turn unto God, "and to bring forth fruits meet for repentance." [Matt. 3. 8.]

I may assent unto this truth, that the *commands of God are holy, just,* and *good.* But yet that which is good will be made *death unto me,* and be an occasion of a greater con- [Rom. 7. 12.]

SERM. LXXII.

demnation, if I continue in sin under so gracious a dispensation.

[2 Cor. 5. 19.] I may know, that "God is in Christ reconciling the world unto Himself." But what will this belief profit me, if the ambassadors of Christ beseech me to be reconciled unto God, and I shut my ears, and go on in my rebellion?

[Ps. 16. 11.] What though I am persuaded, that *in the presence of God* (where the righteous shall be admitted) *there is fulness of joy, and pleasures for evermore:* will this avail me, do you [2 Pet. 1. 10.] suppose, *if I strive not to make my calling and election sure,* by purifying my soul, by keeping my body undefiled, that I may be thought worthy to be admitted into the company of saints and angels?

Lastly; I may believe, and be fully persuaded, that the [Matt. 25. 30.] portion of the wicked will hereafter be, *weeping, and wailing, and gnashing of teeth.* But what signifies it that I know and [Heb. 11. 25.] believe this, if my faith will not oblige me to *forsake the pleasures of sin, which are but for a season?*

From which instances we may be instructed in this great truth, that as true faith is a principle of new life, in every one that has it, so it may easily be seen both by him that has it, and by others.

II. To make this more plain, we shall in the second place [Rom. 4. 22—24.] see, that *this is that faith which made Abraham so dear to God, and was imputed unto him for righteousness; and will be so to every one of us, if we believe on Him who raised up Jesus our Lord from the dead.*

We are assured, that God never left Himself without witness, since the world began. People knew, or might have known, that He who made all things, and kept the world in order, was infinite in *power,* in *wisdom,* and in *goodness.* But the world had so far corrupted itself, that all such as knew this were not ready to act according to this belief; and therefore God did not make His will known, nor promises of favours, but to such as He knew would fear Him, and teach others to do so. Accordingly, he chose Abraham, and his seed, on whom He purposed to bestow very great favours.

But to try his obedience, and whether he was worthy of such favours, and that his faith might be a standard for his posterity to imitate, God was pleased to take this method

with him: He commands him to leave his kindred and his father's house; he immediately obeyed, *and went forth, not knowing whither he went;* only this he knew and believed, that if God commanded him to leave his own country, He would find him a better, because He had promised to bless him *wherever* he went. If God encouraged him to hope for a son, when both he and his wife were as good as dead with respect to issue of their own bodies, yet he doubted not but God could bring it to pass. If God after this commanded him to sacrifice this very son, whom He had promised to make a great nation, yet still he obeyed, *accounting that God was able to raise him from the dead.* [Gen. 12. 1; Heb. 11. 8.] Heb. 11. 19.

In short, whatever God commanded, he was resolved to do, however disagreeable it was to his natural reason or passions. He knew that infinite wisdom and goodness could not command any thing which in the end would not be of advantage to him if he obeyed. He knew that infinite power could bring to pass whatever He promised.

So that, by often reflecting upon these perfections of God, and by exercising himself frequently in acts of self-denial, obedience, and submission to the pleasure of God, he at last brought himself to such a disposition, as to depend upon God, and to observe His commands, however strange and uneasy to flesh and blood; which does well explain that saying of St. James: "By works his faith was made perfect;" that is, by using himself to obey, at last he found nothing too hard for him to submit to. chap. 2. 22.

And thus his faith became exemplary, and a standard of what will be acceptable to God, not only to the Jews, his own posterity, but also to us Christians, even to the end of the world.

And by comparing our faith with this standard, we may be able to see how far we come short of being so well esteemed of God.

And let us be well assured, that if we have not this faith, we shall have reason to repent of it; for trials we *shall* meet with, as sure as we live, *as well as Abraham did;* and he will be a very unhappy person who knows not where to flee for comfort when troubles come upon him.

And though a man should find ways to divert himself; to

SERM. LXXII.

despise things that are afflictions to others; to receive disappointments and losses with patience or unconcernedness, which yet is very hard to do without faith in God: yet still *this thought,* (if ever it comes into the heart,) *What will become of me when I die?* will damp the pleasures of life, and make those that are most unconcerned, to wish that they had *some* security that the next life would not be worse than this. And yet no man living can be sure of this, but he that is blessed with a true and lively faith in God's mercies through Jesus Christ.

And though most Christians, who are in any measure serious, do hope that they have this faith, yet it is much to be feared, that people do often deceive themselves, though it concerns us above all things not to be mistaken.

And those that will be at the pains of asking themselves a few questions, will be better able to judge how well their faith is grounded, and whether it will be able to support them in the day of affliction, and particularly at the hour of death; for then we shall have most need of it. For instance: Let me ask myself, what sort of confidence had I in my father when I was a child, and before I was corrupted by evil habits or examples? Did I ever question his love for *me?* Did not I love *him* even when he corrected me? Did not I lay all my complaints and little sorrows before him? And then let me see whether I behave myself so towards God.

But if, instead of doing so, I am ready to question the kindness and good-will of God, as often as He suffers any thing to come cross upon me; if in poverty I am apt to despair; if I faint in the day of adversity, as if I had no helper; if I forget who it is that took me from my mother's womb, and has taken care of me ever since; then is not my faith plainly such as it ought to be, such as will support me when I shall be sure to want it.

A man who is in good circumstances, and finds his heart thankful and cheerful in the enjoyment of God's good blessings, will be apt, at such a time, to think that such a disposition must sure proceed from a sound faith in God. But then is the proper time to ask one's-self this question: What should I be, if I were stript of all these good things, and exposed to a wicked and unmerciful world? And yet it is the

same just and good God who brings such things to pass, and often *even thus* visits His best servants, and those whom He designs to honour with glory and immortality.

But for what end does God afflict those whom He loves? For what end? Why, to try *their* love for Him; to punish those sins here which must be punished either here or hereafter; to make them less fond of this world, which is not the world they were made for; to train them up, by teaching them, in these lesser instances, to trust on Him at the hour of death. And sometimes to make them examples to others, of the power of faith in them that are perfect.

I know it is ungrateful and uneasy to flesh and blood, to be put upon asking such questions as these; but a good physician does not always regard the ease, but the safety of his patient. And self-examination, we know, is as necessary in spiritual concerns as enquiries of any other kind.

Let me therefore ask,—Do you believe the truth of our Saviour's sermon on the mount? You wonder why that should be questioned of any Christian. Why; are you really satisfied, that men under afflictions and in pain can be happy and rejoice, and for this very reason, because they are in affliction? Are you fully persuaded, that any thing can make a man think himself more happy, because he is evil spoken of, reviled, belied, and persecuted? And yet this is part of our blessed Saviour's sermon: "Blessed are they [Matt. 5.] that mourn." "Blessed are ye when men shall revile you, and persecute you. Rejoice, and be exceeding glad: for great is your reward in heaven."

But if you still say you believe all this, let me beseech you to try your faith by your works, before you are too sure that your faith is as it should be. You will have occasions enough, *depend on it,* of exercising your faith.

It pleaseth God to open your eyes, and to give you a very sensible sight of the danger of your sins: this extremely afflicts and terrifies you. Do you think yourself happy under these sorrows? Are you well pleased that God takes care of you? Are you resolved to make the best use of this chastisement? If you are not, why then, in truth, you do not believe *that they that mourn are happy.*

If any body should be so wicked as to misrepresent your

SERM. LXXII.

best actions, or to treat you ill because you will not do as the world would have you, are you prepared to bear it with patience? Are you resolved not to return evil for evil? If it should be in your power, would you not revenge yourself? If you believe Christ's sermon; He affirmed, that they are certainly *happy who are persecuted for righteousness sake;* that is, while they are in the way of their duty. And a firm persuasion that this is true, will make you bear grief with patience, suffering wrongfully, knowing that a short affliction for God's sake will be well rewarded in a very short time.

[Matt. 5. 10.]

But how must we attain to such a degree of faith as will enable us to do this? Why, just as we must obtain any other grace: namely, by praying to God, from whom cometh every good and perfect gift; by accustoming ourselves to go to Him upon all occasions for what we want; by giving Him thanks for His favours, and acknowledging, at all times, His power, His wisdom, His goodness, and His truth; by trusting in God's providence while we live, and casting our care upon Him who careth for us. By which means we shall gain such an habit of faith, as will be sufficient to enable us to think of death with comfort, and to look beyond the grave with hopes of a much better life than this we leave.

III. And this brings us to the third particular: to consider how the doctrine of the resurrection may, by this faith, be applied to the consciences of all sorts of people, in order to *amend*, or to *awaken*, or to *comfort* them, as their case shall require.

That some men have not the knowledge of God, but indeed live as if there were no God, or that there was no account to be given hereafter, is a sad truth, but too plain to be questioned. What methods shall we take to convince such? What way to awaken them? Shall we preach to them Jesus and the resurrection? Why, truly, these are awakening arguments, where people are disposed to receive the truth.

But what shall we say to those that will not trouble themselves with these things? All that we can do is to pray them to consider, that the truth of these things does not depend upon our believing, or our not caring for them. If God *will*

raise the dead, and judge all men by Jesus Christ, and give to every man according to his ways, and according to the fruit of his doings, this *will* come to pass, though all the world should resolve not to think of it.

Let them make the experiment in cases of less moment: let them try whether their not believing that temporal evils shall come upon them, will keep them from afflictions of that kind; whether those that never think of death, till it overtake them as a snare, whether *they* are ever the farther from it?

Now that there will be a resurrection, and a judgment, and everlasting rewards and punishments, as men shall have deserved, is as *plain* and *certain* to the eye of faith, as it is to the eye of sense and reason, that we shall all die. So that whether they hear, or whether they forbear, a time will come when they will be convinced of these truths. God grant it may not be too late for them to make a good use of their knowledge!

But sure we may hope to do more good upon those that every day *profess to believe these truths:* at least, they will hear with more patience the consequences of such a belief.

There is a curiosity in many people which leads them to enquire what their fortune and condition may be ten or twenty years to come; and foolish people have not stuck at very unwarrantable methods for finding this out. And yet, *which is very strange*, this curiosity does not carry them farther,—to ask, for instance, what may be my lot and portion an hundred years hence? And yet, if any part of me is to have a being then, it concerns me as much that it should be a well-being, as that I should have good fortune for a few years to come.

But this plainly shews us, that the former sort of curiosity is from that evil spirit, who would not have us to carry our enquiries too far, lest the sight of the next world should draw us from his service in this.

On the other hand, the good Spirit of God is ever pressing upon us the thoughts and the belief of the life to come, in order to prepare us for it; and bidding us not mind, at least not set our hearts upon, a world which we must so soon leave, and a life so full of sorrows and uncertainty.

SERM. LXXII.

Which of these spirits shall we hearken to? I will lay before you the consequences of both, and leave you to judge.

If our hearts, our thoughts, and hopes, are set upon this world, and we mind but very little the life to come; why then death, which we cannot put from us very long, will strip us of every thing which we counted valuable. Let a man be never so much feared or beloved in this world, the very moment of death, he has neither friend, nor estate, nor followers, that can help him.

On the other side, if I have thought much of the world to come, and have endeavoured to lay up my treasure there, and to secure the friendship of the blessed inhabitants of paradise, by fitting myself for such worthy company, I shall just value this world as much as it deserves while I stay in it, and be ready, and well pleased, to leave it, when God commands me to depart out of it; as Abraham was to leave his country, when by faith he was sure of a better.

But he, who would be sure of comfort when he comes to die, must be sure to strengthen his faith in God while he lives; by depending upon His promises, by obeying His commands, by submitting to His discipline, and by meditating upon His perfections. This will make the thoughts and the approach of death very easy to us, which otherwise would be very terrible, to go one knows not whither, and without hopes of being happy.

Therefore, if any of you who now hear me are uneasy at the repeating of this article, *I believe a resurrection, and everlasting life after death;* if you are inclined to wish that this may not be true; why then, be sure, that your condition is not safe, and it would be cruelty to let you be quiet.

For the doctrine of the resurrection is indeed full of comfort to such as have accustomed themselves to think of the next life, and have endeavoured to prepare themselves for it.

The *poor*, who have lived on God's providence, have reason to believe, that when they shall rise again, there will an amends be made them for what they wanted here.

The *afflicted*, who have patiently waited their change, are sure that then God will wipe away all tears.

Every *faithful servant of God* is in hopes, and has good reason for it, that God, who has seen his sincerity, his serious

sorrow for his offences, his vows of amendment, and his constant endeavour to keep them; that GOD, who knows that he has been careful, *according to his ability and circumstances*, to understand the will of God, and to perform it; and lastly, that he has cheerfully chosen and made use of the means of grace which God has afforded him; that GOD, who knows all this, will, according to His goodness, and covenant, and promises, *take care of him* when he dies, and is no longer able to help himself; that GOD will make the next life much happier than that he is going to leave: and, being the Lord of all places, and conditions, and powers, will defend him from the terrors of death, from the spirits and powers of darkness, and bring him, in His own good time, to that happiness he has all along hoped and prayed for, even to His everlasting kingdom.

Had Abraham, when he went forth, *not knowing whither he went*, had *he* wanted that faith for which he is so much commended; that is, had he not believed that God (who alone was able to do it) would have kept him in the way he went, he would, no question of it, have gone forth very uncomfortably.

And will not this be the case of every soul here present, and that within a very few years? Shall we not all leave our bodies, our friends, and the places of our abode, to go to a world which we know very little of? And shall not we endeavour to have some tolerable security that God, *at that time*, will not forsake us, nor leave us to the power and malice of evil spirits, to torment, and to punish us?

I only add, *that it will come to this;* and therefore, for God's sake, let us think of it before that day comes, before "the night cometh when no man can work." [John 9. 4.]

But are we sure that our labour will not be in vain; but that we shall *attain the end of our faith, the salvation of our souls?* [1 Pet. 1. 9.]

What more assurance would we have, besides what God has already given us? The rich man in hell, who had lived and died in infidelity, could not think of any surer way of convincing his five brothers that were yet living, than that one should go from the dead to warn them, "lest they also come into that place of torment;" for then, saith he, *they will be-* [Luke 16. 28.]

SERM. LXXII.

lieve. And has not God vouchsafed *us* this very evidence of the *terrors* and the *joys* of the world to come?

Ought not the remembrance of Christ's resurrection from the dead to satisfy, to convince, and to leave us without excuse, if we will not believe that God has determined *we shall all rise again:* they that have done good, or having done amiss, and have repented in time, to life everlasting; and they that have done evil unto everlasting misery.

And if we do not believe this, I need not tell you what effects this faith will have upon us; we shall live, and we shall die, like Christians, full of hopes of a blessed immortality with Jesus Christ our Lord.

To Whom, with the Father, &c.

SERMON LXXIII.

PREACHED BEFORE THE QUEEN, AT ST. JAMES'S, ON HOLY THURSDAY, MAY 10, 1711.

THE INFLUENCE WHICH CHRIST'S ASCENSION OUGHT TO HAVE ON THE LIVES OF CHRISTIANS.

MATT. vi. 21.

Where your treasure is, there will your heart be also.

THOUGH our Saviour applies this proverb to the good or ill use men make of *riches;* intimating, that they who have laid up a *treasure in heaven,* by being bountiful to the poor, will be best pleased when they are thinking of heaven, or doing what may bring them thither; *for the heart will be most there, where we believe we have the greatest interest;* yet it is justly applicable to all the objects of our hopes and desires; that is, we shall always be most delighted with the thoughts of such places, and persons, and employments, as we apprehend may most contribute to our happiness, and from which we have, or expect to have, the greatest advantage.

It is *this* which the Church had most in view, when the service *for this festival* was composed; not barely to bring to our remembrance, that JESUS CHRIST, as on this day, *ascended into heaven,* but to *instruct our practice,* and to put us in mind of the influence this part of the Gospel history ought to have upon our lives. To tell us, if we believe that Jesus Christ is ascended into the heavens, there to intercede with God, and to prepare a place for us, that we should have this much in our minds, and at heart; that we should follow Him thither with our best affections, and with Him continually dwell. And (because of ourselves we cannot do this) to teach

SERM. LXXIII.

and to oblige us, at least upon every return of this season, to pray, *that our hearts and minds may be in heaven, where our Lord Jesus Christ is gone before us:* He being our greatest treasure, and the fountain of all our happiness.

Now, that our *understandings* and *affections* may keep pace together, that when we are bid "to seek those things which are above, where Christ sitteth at the right hand of God;" that the reason of the thing may affect us, as well as the authority of Him that bids us do so, it will be fit to consider, *what good we may hope for* from our Saviour's presence in heaven? Why our hearts should be *there* rather than any where else? Why should we have *Him*, and His *glory*, and *authority*, most in our eye? What will be the *real advantages* of such a conversation? And, lastly, what will be the consequence of placing our hearts and affections elsewhere? All which we may consider under these two heads:

[Col. 3. 1.]

First, *what interest or treasure we have in heaven, and how the consideration of that ought to affect us.*

Secondly, *the motives, the consequence, and the danger, of fixing our hearts elsewhere.*

I. And indeed, there are many reasons why *our hearts should be in heaven;* but that which of all others is the most likely to affect us, is this: that Jesus Christ is *there*, and in such glorious circumstances, as must at once oblige us to *think* of Him with satisfaction, to *serve* Him with pleasure, and to *desire* to follow His steps and directions in the way which leads to that blessed place.

For, first, He is there *as a Prince*, to whom all power is given both in heaven and in earth; *angels, and principalities, and powers, being made subject unto Him.* The consequence of this is, He will govern the world, as with the greatest authority, so with the greatest wisdom, justice and goodness; that neither the wickedness of men, nor the power or malice of devils shall hinder or disturb the great ends of His government,—*the glory of God*, and the *good of the whole creation.*

[1 Pet. 3. 22.]

And though we cannot always account for the ways of His providence, nor indeed is it fit we should—we are not let into the councils of earthly princes; yet we are sure, it will one day appear that *justice* has been executed impartially upon *men*, upon *families*, upon *kingdoms;* that all, even the most

surprising and melancholy events, have been foreseen and directed to ends worthy of the wisdom of God; and that His *mercy* and *goodness* was there where we have been most apt to suspect His love.

Thus we are sure it ever *will be;* because, wherever we have been able to see *the reason of things,* thus it *always has been.* He has governed the world with a powerful and steady hand; He has kept the ambitious within the bounds appointed them; called those to an account, whom no power on earth could bring into judgment. He has brought the counsel of the wicked to nought; has received the petitions, pitied the complaints, and has eased the grievances, of such as could have none to hear, none to help them on this side heaven.

In short; it is by the virtue of *Christ's authority at the right hand of God,* that He keeps the world from being only a place of disorder, of oppression and cruelty, of confusion and misery.

Here then is matter of real *concern* and *advantage* to us, and therefore matter of *real joy,* that we have in heaven a security against all our fears, whether for the public, for our friends, or for ourselves. That nothing can befall us, without the knowledge, without the direction, or permission, of our Prince and Saviour. That He may, indeed, suffer His judgments to be in the world, *that the inhabitants of the earth may* [Is. 26. 9.] *learn righteousness;* that we may deserve evils, and bring them upon ourselves; that we may be forced to suffer here, to prevent greater sufferings hereafter. But then, all this is manifestly for the good of the world, as well as for the glory of God.

And the conclusion will be, that our *faith,* and *hope,* and *confidence,* should be where our only help is,—*in heaven;* that our eyes should be upon *Him,* who rules the world in righteousness, when we know not what to do ourselves; that neither the vicegerents of Christ, nor their subjects, need to take unjustifiable ways to support their government or interests, while He sitteth at the right hand of God, who is the fountain of all justice and power; that we need not advance principles destructive of Christianity, to bring about our designs, if they are really such as become the subjects

SERM. LXXIII.

and servants of Jesus Christ to be concerned in; that such as are *highest in power* should not despise their fellow-creatures, since there is *One* that is *higher than they*, who takes cognizance of their actions; and that such as have no power to help themselves ought not to despair, since justice will be done, and an amends made them, either here or hereafter, for what they have lost or suffered for righteousness' sake. Lastly; that if we be careful to do our duty, and to leave events, where they ought to be, in the hands of Him who governs the world, we may depend upon it, all will be well for us, and ordered for the best.

Secondly; JESUS CHRIST *is at the right hand of God, as the head of His Church.* "God," saith the Apostle, "God hath set Him at His own right hand, far above all principality and power, and might, and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this world, but also in that which is to come; and hath put all things under His feet, and gave Him to be head over all things to the Church;" that is, for the benefit of the Church, "*which is His body.*"

Eph. 1. 20—23.

The consequence of this has been,—Jesus Christ, after His ascension, according to His *true promise*, sent down the Holy Ghost from heaven, who in a most wonderful manner *inspired* and *enabled* the APOSTLES OF CHRIST, and *their successors*, to plant the GOSPEL OF TRUTH in the world; not by fantastical appearances and false prophecies, but by real and undoubted miracles, by true and substantial fruits of holiness, in their own, and in the lives of those they converted. By which means we, amongst many other nations, were brought out of darkness and error into the clear light and true knowledge of God, and of Jesus Christ.

And though, for ends best known to His infinite wisdom, He afterwards suffered *ignorance, errors,* and even *gross idolatry,* to overspread a great part of the Church; yet in great goodness, He was pleased to forewarn His faithful servants of the approaching darkness, of the *coming of antichrist,* and of his destruction; and this by undoubted prophecies, which *have been,* and *are to be,* fulfilled in their season.

By which means, such as feared God, and acquainted themselves with His Word, were preserved from idolatry, and *con-*

tinued a Church in the midst of such darkness and persecutions, as no power but that of God could have hindered, *that the gates of hell had not prevailed against it;* till at last, the REFORMATION came on: another *surprising work* of His providence, as head of His Church, when by means *unforeseen,* in themselves *despicable* enough, and yet in their effects *certain* and *irresistible,* the power of antichrist was broken; and light, and truth, and Christian liberty, appeared once more in the Church of Christ.

Now, it is almost impossible but these considerations must affect us; and if they do, these will be the fruits of our meditations:

We shall adore the wisdom, and power, and providence of Him that hath foreseen and disposed of all events, for the advantage of *His body the Church.* And we shall never take unwarrantable ways to secure an interest, which He is so much concerned for; and which He has so wonderfully preserved ever since His ascension to this day.

But rather, as the most effectual way to secure His favour and protection, and that He may not *remove our candlestick,* and take away from us *the light of the Gospel,* as He has done from many Churches already, we shall endeavour to restore *true Christian discipline,* by which, *wickedness,* wherever it is met with, may be discountenanced; the *doctrine of theGo spel* preserved in its purity and simplicity; and none admitted to continue members of *that body,* but such as shall render themselves worthy of having JESUS CHRIST for their head.

As *sincere members of this body,* we shall often call to mind the relation we have to the Son of God; the example He gave us; the rules of holiness and purity He left us; and the happiness He has promised His faithful servants; never undervaluing the blessing of being members of a society, to which so many glorious privileges have been granted. Another of which we now come to consider;

Thirdly; *that Jesus Christ is at God's right hand, as our great High-Priest;* representing His own death and merits, and by them making intercession for us at the throne of grace. "Seeing" (saith the Apostle) "we have a great High-Priest that is passed into the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us come boldly to the throne of grace, that we may obtain Heb. 4. 14—16.

SERM. LXXIII.

mercy, and find grace to help in time of need." Which words have a particular relation to the atonement which was made once every year, for the children of Israel, and for all their sins.

Lev. 16. 34.

For, as the high-priest went yearly into the holy place with the *blood of the sacrifices,* which *he offered for himself, and for the errors of the people;* so Christ, having obtained eternal redemption for us, by the sacrifice of Himself once for all, He ascended into heaven, *there to appear in the presence of God for us;* and as able to save to the uttermost *all that come unto God by Him.*

[Heb. 9. 7, 24; 7. 25.]

It is the *knowledge* and the *consideration* of this, which recommends the Christian religion to the consciences of its professors; delivering them from the apprehensions of God's displeasure, to which they know they are justly liable, and enabling them to serve Him without fear, in holiness and righteousness, all the days of their lives.

For whenever the remembrance of *this* is seasonably present with us, it is not the *number of our sins,* nor the *greatness* of them; it is not the *majesty of Him whom we have offended,* nor our *own inability to satisfy His justice,* that can drive us to despair, when we call to mind, that *the beloved* SON OF GOD *is our Advocate, our Priest, and Sacrifice.*

If we look back upon the heathen world, we shall better see the value of this blessing; we shall see men fondly catching at every thing, to save themselves from perishing; sacrificing their very children, to make their consciences easy under the burden of their transgressions; but all in vain, while they wanted the testimony of God, *that with such sacrifices He was pleased.*

Now this testimony God has vouchsafed us, that He was *pleased* with our *sacrifice;* that our *Redeemer is in heaven;* that *God is in Christ reconciling the world unto Himself,* not imputing unto them their former sins. All this we justly conclude, from *His resurrection from the dead;* from *His sending down the Holy Ghost;* and from *the reception which the Gospel has met with,* against the natural inclinations of mankind.

This then is our confidence, the hope and comfort of sinners, that "we have *an advocate with the Father,* who is

[1 John 2. 1, 2.]

also *the propitiation for our sins.*" But then, this will affect men just as they are disposed to receive the truth: "They that are whole need not a physician, but they that are sick." [Luke 5. 31.]

Such as stand condemned from the reproaches of their own conscience, and would be glad to be free from the guilt of their offences, and the punishment that is due to them: to such, it will be great pleasure to remember, that their High-Priest is at the right hand, and in great authority with God; that by His intercession, their sins may be done away, and their pardon sealed in heaven before they go hence, and be no more seen.

On the other hand, *they that seldom think of what may come hereafter;* that are eagerly bent upon the pleasures, or riches, or honours of the world, and see no danger in conversing with them; or who, being engaged in sinful courses, will not believe, that they are accountable to the justice of God for the breach of His laws: on such minds as these, the knowledge of a *Redeemer*, of an *High-Priest*, of an *Advocate in heaven*, will make no impression; they see no advantage in these names, no beauty in *Him* to whom they belong, that they should desire Him.

But is there, therefore, nothing desirable, nothing that may *invite the heart* to meditate with pleasure on what He has done, and is still doing for us? Yes, sure; and we shall have still more reason to confess this, when we have considered in the last place,

That Jesus Christ is gone to heaven, to prepare a place for us.

The words of Christ Himself are these: "I go to prepare a place for you, that where I am, there ye may be also." [John 14. 2, 3.]

Let us take a *distant prospect* of the place, as it is described in other Scriptures; let us see whether it is worth *setting our hearts upon.*

A place, where all tears, and the occasions of them, shall be taken away; where no oppressor can enter, no disease afflict the immortal inhabitants, nor danger approach them: a place of *security*, of *glory*, of *pleasure*, for ever; where the *greatest on earth* will be *highly exalted*, and where the *meanest* may find admittance, if it is not their own fault.

Such is the place our blessed Lord is *preparing for us;*

such is the happiness we are invited *to set our hearts upon;* that, when our Lord shall call for us, we may be prepared and pleased to change our abode, having disengaged our affections from the world, and placed them there where we are to live for ever.

In short; the blessedness of the place, the nature of its inhabitants, the purity of their manners, the employment of their time, all conspire to make us pleased and serious: pleased with the hopes of being, one day, one of that happy company, and seriously careful to do every thing which becomes such an expectation.

To conclude all that has been said upon this head. Whether we consider JESUS CHRIST, at the right hand of God, as a *mighty Prince,* governing the world in righteousness; or as the *Head of the Church* dispersed over the earth; or triumphant in heaven; or as our *great High-Priest,* making intercession for us continually; or, lastly, as our *fore-runner,* preparing a place for us: here are subjects worthy our meditations, worthy the making them our greatest treasure; here is matter of love, of joy, and gratitude and thanksgiving, for ever.

And we come to consider,

II. *The motives and consequences of fixing our hearts elsewhere.*

That we are but too apt to do so, every day's experience convinces even the *best of men;* and yet we find that we do so, at the expense of our peace here, and at the hazard of our souls hereafter. What have we to say for ourselves?

First; we are afraid of losing *the pleasures of this life,* by being too intent upon, and solicitous for, the next. What pleasures? The pleasure of living without thought, and without fear, even where there is reason to apprehend danger? The pleasure of appearing what we really are not, contented under bitter remorse, pleased with our condition while we are under great uneasiness and uncertainties; pretending to satisfy the desires of others, making them depend on us for that happiness which we want ourselves? Or is it the pleasure of living without law, and without restraint; of doing whatever is in the power of our hand to do; of gratifying our appetites to the destruction of our bodies or es-

tates; or, lastly, is it the pleasure of going out of the world, at all adventures, to a place, which, for ought we know, may be much worse than that we leave?

If these are the *pleasures* which we cannot give up for the *hopes of heaven*, they are such as we have hardly the countenance to defend; and therefore it will not be worth while to go about to expose them.

Secondly; but *we cannot quit the world*, in which we have so many engagements. Why, who bids us? Are not we sent into the world on purpose to try how we shall behave ourselves in it? Has not the providence of God appointed a great variety of states and conditions of life, that every one may have his proper trial? Are there not people who have *great power and authority*, without using them to evil purposes? *Riches*, without spending them all upon their lusts and vanities? *Learning* and *great parts*, without being proud or factious? On the other hand; are there not people who are *very poor*, and yet *very contented;* not attempting to better their condition by unjust ways, but with great patience expecting that an amends will be made them in the next world, for what they want in this?

In one word: we may live in the world without doating on it, without setting up our rest in it; and we may sometimes retire out of it, converse with God, think of what may become of us when we shall be forced to leave it, and timely prepare for so great a change.

Thirdly; but *is it not hard to dwell upon thoughts, and to submit to laws, so very contrary to the way of the world?* Why, this is the truth of the case: Jesus Christ came from heaven; He came to shew us the way thither; He found the world engaged in customs and manners, very unlike those of the place He designed to bring us to. It was therefore necessary, He should give us such *rules* to walk by, such *examples* to follow, such *doctrines* to believe and depend on, as *He* knew were proper to fit us for the place, and company, and happiness, He should prepare for His servants and followers.

These things He commanded us *seriously to think of*,—to make them the *delight*, as they are the *concern*, of our souls. And it is our *crime*, and not our *apology*, that we find it so

SERM. LXXIII.

hard to disengage our affections from the *ways of the world*, which we have been so long fond of, and which have estranged us from *the love of God*.

Fourthly; but *may we not love the world, and yet be secure of the favour of God?* The Spirit of God tells us expressly, *we cannot;* that an heart divided betwixt God and the world, can never be a sacrifice acceptable to *Him*, who gives us all the good we enjoy, and promises us more than we can comprehend. And sad experience may convince us, how hazardous and afflicting it is, to attempt to keep a correspondence with two so opposite powers.

1 John 2. 15.

The *world* will *gain* upon our hearts. We shall every day see less danger in conversing with it; we shall learn to admire, to imitate, to defend its pleasures, its vanities, and its vices; and, in time, we shall find satisfaction, and an agreeableness in those very things which we know will be our destruction.

If we retain a sense of God in our minds, it will only serve to afflict us, while we know we do not love Him with all our hearts. And though we dare not, for our lives, renounce the hopes of heaven and happiness; yet, since we cannot think of them with any assurance and delight, the thoughts of them will only serve to distract and to torment us.

This is the consequence of desiring *to secure the favour of God*, while we are *passionately concerned for the world;* and this is the case of an infinite number of people, either struggling to free themselves from the *bondage of corruption*, without a *sincere* and *resolute purpose* of doing so, or carried along with the stream of evil customs, forbidden liberties, or destructive vices, till they shall no longer retain God in their knowledge, till God gives them over to a mind void of judgment.

And now, the most useful conclusion to this discourse will be, to lay down the *characters* of a *worldly*, and of *a Christian spirit*, by which every one, for himself, may be able to judge *what spirit he is of*. And this we may certainly do, by the general bent of our hearts and affections; for where the heart delights to dwell, there, no doubt of it, is its treasure, whether here or in heaven.

[Ps. 4. 4.] Now, for a man not to be able to "commune with his own

heart," but with the utmost impatience; nor to *think of eternity*, but with the fears of a criminal; to be fond of all opportunities and occasions of diverting the mind from conversing with God; to be afraid of retirement, as of a plague; and to run into company, business, or pleasures, only to avoid the sight of one's-self; to be most concerned to adorn, to gratify, to indulge the body, and its appetites; these are certain marks and characters of a *worldly spirit*, and of an *unregenerate state*.

And the misfortune is, there are people, who keeping themselves free from open and scandalous crimes, for which they cannot be called to an account, apprehend no great danger from all this.

With this spirit they can *pray*, without a sense of their dependence upon God; they can *read*, without being at all convinced of the truth; can frequent the public worship, without any benefit to themselves, or honour to Him whom they pretend to serve. With this spirit they can *converse with the world*, without concern and caution; hear the *name of God blasphemed* without pain; and see *religion under contempt*, and its laws every where violated, without endeavouring, without desiring, a reformation. And who, say they, can *judge* us? Would to God we could be persuaded to judge ourselves, "that we be not judged of the Lord!" [1 Cor. 11. 31, 32.]

But the world *will judge us*, whether we will or no. And there are outward actions which effectually discover the true sense and state of the soul, and that judgment which, without a timely repentance, will one day pass upon us.

A man, for instance, who speaks of religion with an air that plainly discovers an aversion for its precepts, and a contempt of its rewards, let him pretend what he will, loves neither God nor religion.

No man, who despises the priesthood on earth, can with any truth be said to value Jesus Christ, the head of that holy order, in heaven.

We cannot be said to value the happiness which Christ is preparing for His friends and servants, while we have so sensible a relish for the pleasures of this life, as to be entirely satisfied with them; never easy, but when we are seeking, enjoying, or thinking of them.

SERM. LXXIII.

In short; to gratify the inclinations, whenever they are importunate; to be fond of such diversions as at best are suspicious, and but too apt to corrupt the manners, and take off the mind from whatever is serious and of moment; to be ashamed of doing what the Gospel requires, because it is not according to the way of the world; to be afraid of the censures of men, more than of the judgment of God: wherever this is the case, it will be to no purpose to dissemble either the sin, or the danger; it would be cruelty to suffer such people to hope for mercy, without first giving a new turn to their thoughts, their desires, and their actions.

On the other hand; one *whose treasure is in heaven* will have his conversation there also; and it will appear that he has so, by the fruits of an holy, regular, and useful life.

For the *knowledge* and *love of God*, where these possess the heart, will easily determine a man how to act in every circumstance.

[1 John 2. 1.]

If he remembers, that he has an *Advocate in heaven;* this will encourage him to go to the *throne of grace*, with a becoming boldness, whether for help or pardon.

But yet he will not dare to do so, while he continues under the dominion of sin; for this would be to affront his *Prince* and *Saviour*, to despise His authority, and to set at nought the terms of mercy which He has offered to all such as repent, and turn to God, and "bring forth fruits meet for repentance;" and therefore he calls himself to an account, without scruple, and without reserve.

[Matt. 3. 8.]

When he remembers his *Benefactor*, the place and the happiness which He has prepared for His followers, it is natural to be pleased with the thoughts of what he may one day enjoy. But then he considers, that it would be the utmost folly to hope to be a companion of saints and angels, without fitting himself for such glorious company.

If business calls him into the world, he keeps his eye, however, upon the *one thing needful;* and remembering, that "all things are naked and open unto the eyes of Him with whom we have to do," he is *sincere* in all his ways, *just* without *compulsion*, *charitable* without *ostentation*, and *devout* without *hypocrisy*.

[Heb. 4. 13.]

If he is to *obey*, he does it *for conscience sake;* and if it is

his lot to *command*, he always remembers that *he has a Master in heaven.*

He considers, that it is not for strangers and pilgrims in the world, to be fond of it to excess; and therefore he finds it necessary to keep his desires within bounds, to deny himself many liberties, because there may be danger in them, though the world will not think so.

He lays these necessary restraints upon all his *diversions*, that they be innocent, and that they steal not away too much of his heart and time.

In short; his affections being in heaven, this makes his conversation on earth innocent, agreeable, and useful.

And now, let us call our virtue to the test; let us see, whether we do indeed value "the things that are above, where Christ sitteth on the right hand of God?"

It is folly to say we do so, if we never think of them. Is it so with us in any other case? Do people that own they love the world, do *they* think of it but seldom? Do they think of any thing else? Do they want to be persuaded to speak of it, to commend it, to enjoy it?

And let us not judge our condition to be safe, from a few instances of outward devotion, from a few acts of charity, which may be the effects of shame or vanity; or from a reservedness in conversation, which common decency obliges to; for in truth, *the only test of our sincerity and love of God* is this, that we endeavour "that God in all things may be obeyed and glorified." [1 Pet. 4. 11.]

The consequence of which will appear in our lives. We shall value things just as they deserve. Such as are uncertain, of no long continuance, which will neither make us wiser, nor better, nor more useful in our generations, we shall value accordingly; and be most concerned to know, and to remember, and practise, what is necessary to fit us for a blessed eternity.

In short; we shall be very careful to let the thoughts of heaven, and the business of the world to come, have their share, at least, of our time and employment; and we shall shew *that we love God, by keeping His commandments.* [1 John 5. 3.]

But, how shall we bring our hearts to this temper? How shall we bring our wills to submit to this law of life? Why,

SERM. LXXIII.

just as we obtain any other grace or virtue; by *reason*, by *meditation*, and *prayer*.

We are sure, *this is not the place we were made for;* and we easily see, that the things we so much admire are but marks of slavery, and sad instances of our being chained down to a world, which can never make us happy; that therefore we ought to disengage our hearts from it as soon as may be.

And then, let us remember, that all the little arts of *diverting ourselves*, and stifling that remorse which is the consequence of consenting to known iniquity, will soon be at an end; and we shall, in a little time, be sick of those pleasures, which now we are so fond of.

Then let us turn our eyes upon the place and happiness which our blessed Saviour has purchased and prepared for us. Let us retire, and consider on what conditions we may be happy for ever.

And if we find that the promise is sure, the reward worth our utmost endeavours, the conditions reasonable and necessary; what can we do less, than to *pray to God to fix these thoughts in our hearts*, to wean our affections from a world which we are but too apt to be fond of, and which will ruin us if we are so; and to bring us to Himself, by what ways to Him seem most meet?

If we live in the practice of *these duties*, our affections will be loose from the world, our hearts much in heaven, and we shall be secure of the favour of God, and from fear of evil.

Now, to make us very serious and concerned about these things, let us remember, *That this same Jesus, which was taken up from us into heaven, shall so come in like manner as He has been seen to go into heaven, namely, in the glory of His Father, with His holy angels; when He shall reward every man according to his works.*

[Acts 1. 11; Matt. 16. 27.]

Now, unto Him that sitteth upon the throne, and unto the Lamb, be ascribed blessing, and honour, and glory, and power, for ever and ever. Amen.

SERMON LXXIV.

THE MERCY OF GOD IN SENDING THE HOLY GHOST TO CONVERT THE WORLD, AND TO REMAIN WITH HIS CHURCH FOR EVER.

JOHN xvi. 7.

I tell you the truth; it is expedient for you that I go away: for if I go not away, the Comforter will not come unto you; but if I depart, I will send Him unto you.

THAT it would be better, and for their advantage, that Christ should leave His disciples, was a hard lesson, and our Saviour was forced to use an extraordinary way of speaking to satisfy them: I TELL YOU THE TRUTH.

And will not this for ever silence the corrupt reasonings of men, and oblige them to submit to the wisdom of God in all His dispensations; and look upon that to be the best which He does, how much soever it contradicts *their* hopes or desires? That it would be better for the world that Christ, who had done so much good in it, should leave it; that it would be better for His disciples, who had been preserved, and taught, and comforted, by His presence, to have Him depart from them.

And yet this was the best for them, and for the world also. For when Jesus Christ had satisfied the justice of God by His death, He (according to His promise) sent down the Holy Ghost to teach and to comfort *them*, to convince and to convert the world.

By which good Spirit the apostles were enabled to teach mankind the way of happiness, whereby we, amongst many other nations, have been brought out of darkness and error, into the clear light and true knowledge of God, and of His Son Jesus Christ; and by which good Spirit, all Christians

SERM. LXXIV.

(if it is not their own fault) are enabled to know the will of God, and to do what God requires of them.

By Him they are put in mind of their duty when they forget it; corrected when they are backward and negligent, supported under all temptations, comforted under afflictions, until they are fit for the kingdom of heaven.

Now, that we may better understand the mercy of God in sending the Holy Ghost after a very wonderful manner, to convert the world, and ever since to remain with His Church, to increase the number of believers, to guide and to preserve them to eternal happiness: that we may all be truly thankful to Christ for this great blessing, and very careful not to grieve the good Spirit of God, by which we are sanctified, it will be proper to consider these two particulars:

First, *what we are by nature without the assistance of the Holy Ghost.*

Secondly, *what we are by grace;* that is, as we are under the government and blessing of that good Spirit.

I. And first; we may see *what we are by nature,* by considering the condition of mankind before the Gospel was published; as well as by looking upon those parts of the world where it is not yet received.

The holy Scripture does very significantly call the state of mankind before the preaching of the Gospel, *a state of darkness:* "Ye were sometimes darkness, but now are ye light;" that is, ye were heretofore heathens, but now ye are Christians. And it was truly a state of darkness. They were subject to the prince and powers of darkness; they were engaged in works of darkness; they were ignorant of the true God; they were without hopes and without promises.

Eph. 5. 8.

And thus it is, at this day, with all those nations who have not yet received the Gospel; they are under such power and dominion of the devil, as makes all good Christians to pity them. To see creatures like ourselves worship the sun and moon, and cry for help to creatures that cannot hear nor help them; to see them worship those very evil spirits which delight to afflict mankind, is what should make us seriously to value the blessing of knowing better things.

But we need not go so far for instances of what we are by nature, void of grace. Let us but seriously think of it, that

whatever difference there is amongst men, if one man is in any thing better than another, it is purely owing to the good Spirit of God; for we are all born in sin, and prone to it; and though we have reason and understanding, yet we may see into what errors it would lead us, by observing into what errors it leads others. For is there any wickedness that can be named, that men born with reason, but destitute of the grace of God, have not committed?

Our first parents are an instance sufficient to shew us what reason, in its greatest perfection, when left to itself, will end in; namely, in the destruction of those that trust to it. And will any man on earth pretend to govern himself by reason better than they did?

In short; there is nothing so wicked, nothing so base, that one man is guilty of, but another is, by nature, capable of being so. And though this may look strange to one who finds in his breast an abhorrence for some vices, and supposes that he should die rather than be guilty of them; yet he may perhaps change his thoughts, when he considers, that there are few people who, in many instances, do not come to be in love with vices, which once in their lives they had a hearty dislike to. The holy Scriptures have given us several very noted examples of this. "Am I a dog," saith Hazael to the Prophet, "that ever I should do such vile things?" And yet, for all this abhorrence, he did those very wicked actions. "Though I die with Thee," said St. Peter, "yet will I not deny Thee in any wise:" and yet, being left to himself, to make good that resolution, you know how it ended. [2 Kings 8. 13; Mark 14. 31.]

Now, these things are written for our example, that we may see what poor, weak, vile creatures we are by nature; that we may learn not to value ourselves, not to trust in our own strength; and to know, that whenever we do any thing that is good or praiseworthy, *it is God that worketh in us both to will, and to do, of His own good pleasure,* that we may justly ascribe the whole glory to God, who, having given us the earnest of His Spirit in baptism, continues to guide, and protect, and bless us all our days, at least until we drive that good Spirit from us by our evil deeds. [Phil. 2. 13.]

II. And this brings us to consider *what we are by grace;* that is, as we are sanctified by the Holy Ghost.

SERM. LXXIV.

Now that I may do this more to your advantage, I must first in a few words, and in as plain a way as I can, endeavour to make you sensible of the true state and condition of a Christian.

Let us consider then, that we are creatures subject to sin and to misery; that God has permitted us to be born in this condition, that we may see the sad effects of forsaking the commands of God; and that, when we find we are unable to help ourselves, we may be brought to look up to and depend on Him for help and happiness, which, at our baptism, without any merit of ours, God hath covenanted to give us.

Now, to prove us, whether we will indeed live in a constant dependence upon God, and at all times seek to Him for help, He hath permitted the devil to tempt us; that is, to endeavour to draw us from our duty; but at the same time, we have this faithful promise, that His good Spirit shall ever be with us, to defend, and comfort, and strengthen us, provided we seek to Him for help, and do not grieve Him by continuing in any known sin.

To encourage us thus to serve God, whatever good thing we do by *His* assistance, He will graciously reward it, as if it had been done purely by ourselves.

But if we shall neglect or despise God's assistance, and, by depending upon ourselves, yield to temptations, the Spirit of God will forsake us, and we shall become the devil's servants, and be very miserable both in this life and another.

From which it appears, that this world is not the place we were made for, but that this life is a state of trial and discipline, a state of temptation and danger. And yet we have no reason to complain; for if we depend upon God, He will give us an exceeding great reward, such as we could never deserve; and we are sure not to miscarry but by our own faults.

Nay, I must add, that the condition of every Christian is safer and better than that of our first parents in their state of innocency. They had reason and innocency to support them, and they notwithstanding fell; instead of which, we have an Almighty hand ever with us to assist and guide us, and a faithful promise of such a reward as by nature we have no right to. And if at any time we fall, we have an

Advocate with God, ready to make our peace upon our true repentance.

This is the true state and condition we are in, and you cannot but be convinced that it is a safe one, and much better than we deserve.

Now, as safe a condition as this is, it is plain, that very many, by their own fault, miscarry, and are undone for ever. Therefore, that we may, from the mistakes of others, learn to be more careful of ourselves, let us consider, how it comes to pass that men perish under such safe and powerful means of grace.

And, *first*, very many miscarry by not taking notice of God's Spirit working in their hearts.

The holy Scriptures give us notice, that of ourselves we are not able to think one good thought, but that "it is God that worketh in us both to will and to do." So that we may be assured, if at any time our consciences are awake, if we are afraid of God's judgments, if we are sensible of His mercies, if we are troubled with the thoughts of having offended Him by our sin; we may be assured, that all this is the work of the Spirit of God, and that to endeavour in such case to quiet our minds, to divert our thoughts by business or pleasures, is truly to resist the Holy Ghost, and to quench the Spirit. Phil. 2. 13.

So likewise, if we are under any outward afflictions, as sickness, loss of friends, loss of goods, or the like; we know by the word of God, that nothing comes by chance, but that all things are ordered by the providence of God for the good of His creatures; and that these are ways by which the Holy Ghost would make us sensible of our errors, wean us from the love of this world, and make us desirous of a better. And therefore it is said, concerning afflictions of this kind, "God speaketh once, yea twice, yet man perceiveth it not." Job 33. 14.

So that to be unconcerned when God afflicts us, is not to perceive the voice of God. And this is one way by which men miscarry.

And, *secondly*, another is, by their not making use of the means which God has afforded them for their salvation.

We can do nothing without God's help; but if we can have His help for asking it, as we ought to do, it is then

SERM. LXXIV.

plainly our own fault if we have it not. And that we may have it for asking, our blessed Saviour has assured us, after
Luke 11. 13. a very sensible manner: "If ye, being evil, know how to give good things unto your children, how much more shall your heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to them that ask Him?"

Do but consider how ready parents are to give their children what is fit for them, when *they* ask, and you will be satisfied, that it is your own fault, if you have not such a measure of grace and strength as is necessary for your safety.

[Heb. 11. 6.] It is true, "Without faith," that is, without believing the word of God, "it is impossible to please God." And it is as true, that I cannot believe what I please. But if I once know that faith comes by hearing, that is, by attending to the word of God read or preached: if the word of God is read to us every Lord's day, and we regard it not, but endeavour to thrust it away from us, and choke the good seed by minding of other things; why then our destruction is of ourselves. For the word of God is quick and powerful, able to convert the greatest sinner, who will but seriously attend to it.

But if a man, when he hears what God, in that holy Word, has threatened to wilful sinners, that there is a place
[Mark 9. 44] "where the worm dieth not, and where the fire is not quenched;" that this will most certainly be the portion of all them that die in their sins unrepented of; that all such as neglect and despise the means of grace and salvation shall be tormented for ever and ever. If people, when they hear this, are not at all concerned, but go on without laying it to heart; and strive to divert these thoughts and fears, and run out of the way of hearing the truth of them made out to their consciences; why, it is manifest, they *will not* be saved, though the Holy Ghost is striving with them to bring them to heaven.

And when they hear what the Spirit of God has made known to us concerning the joys of heaven; that it is impossible for the tongue of man to describe, or for the heart of man to conceive, what great blessings the Lord hath laid up for them that love Him; that God for the sake of Jesus

Christ has published a full and free pardon for all sinners, who with hearty repentance and true faith turn unto Him; that in order to our being happy, He will expect no more from us than what He will enable us to perform. If people, when they hear these promises, will not mind them, but are resolved to take their share of pleasures here, whatever becomes of those that God has promised hereafter; all that must be said is, that they will be for ever undone, that the Holy Ghost would save them, by setting these promises before them to make them desirous of heaven, but they will not be persuaded.

And thus many miscarry for want of faith, notwithstanding the Holy Spirit is amongst us, striving to bring us all to that knowledge of God, and to that obedience which would save our souls.

Thirdly; but it is not only for want of hearing the word of God that men miscarry; even they that read and think of these things may be lost, if they are not careful to maintain good works. It is a Gospel direction, "If we live in the Spirit, let us also walk in the Spirit;" that is, if we believe and live under the Gospel, let us do what the Gospel commands us. If we are dedicated to the Spirit of God, and hope for His help and assistance, let us live like people that do so. Gal. 5. 25.

Now if, instead of doing this, we grieve the Holy Spirit, by going against our consciences; by refusing to obey the precepts of Christ, when we know them; by yielding to the temptations of the devil, without asking God's help, without which we know we cannot resist that powerful spirit; if we continue to do so, though the Spirit of God shews us the great danger we are in, then we grieve the Holy Ghost, by which we were sanctified, and He will leave us to ourselves, and we shall certainly be ruined.

Lastly (notwithstanding the assistance of God's Holy Spirit), there are many who have taken up good resolutions of serving God, and yet miscarry for want of continuing in them unto their lives' end: for either they despair of succeeding, through a sense of their own weakness, or they neglect to make use of and to improve the means of grace, which for the present God has given them: either of which will most certainly be their ruin.

SERM. LXXIV.

But if, instead of despairing of success, people would consider, that greater is He that is in us (that is, the Holy Ghost), than he that is in the world (that is, the devil). If people would but call to mind the power of the Holy Ghost, as it is delivered to us in the holy Scriptures, by Whom ignorant men became of a sudden teachers of others; the Holy Ghost enabling them to speak unknown languages, to work miracles, to confirm their doctrines, and to convince the world that they were not possessed with a spirit of error and delusion.

If men would observe what a change is made upon those who from great sinners have become true penitents; that from having been strongly inclined to sin, they are become as much inclined to holiness; to have quite different thoughts of their former way of living; not now to look upon sin as a harmless, indifferent thing, but, as indeed it is, to be avoided rather than death itself. In a word, that their whole man has been changed or made new, in so much as the Scriptures call this a *new birth*, and being *born again*.

Whoever thinks seriously of these things will conclude, that there is nothing impossible with God; and that though our sins are so many that we cannot recount them, though we have no power of ourselves to help ourselves; yet if we earnestly seek to God for help, and lay hold of the means offered to us, it is certain we shall be safe, provided we use that measure of grace which God gives us; for this is a rule given us by our blessed Saviour: "To him that hath shall be given, and he shall have abundantly; but from him that hath not, shall be taken away even that which he seemeth to have." To him that hath, (that is, that hath made use of the grace which God hath given him,) to him God will give more grace: but he that neglects the means of grace, from him shall be taken away even what before He had given him.

[Matt. 13. 12; Luke 8. 18.]

People do not consider how dangerous a thing it is to put by good thoughts, to neglect the good advice of their friends, to lose opportunities of knowing their duty. If they would but consider, that all these are means of grace; that they are indeed the work of the Holy Ghost; they would not so easily despise them, but would really be afraid of rejecting

the least degrees of grace afforded them for their conversion and salvation.

The Pharisees rejected the counsel of God,—His gracious design towards them; they rejected the counsel of God in refusing the baptism of John; and look, what followed their despising these lesser favours. They afterwards rejected the Son of God Himself, and His doctrine, though approved and confirmed by miracles. Luke 7. 30.

The same Spirit, which has declared, that He will not break a bruised reed, nor quench the smoking flax; that He will encourage the very beginnings of piety; the same Spirit has also said these terrible words: "Because I called, and ye refused; I stretched out My hand, and no man regarded; I will also laugh at your calamity, and mock when your fear cometh." So dangerous a thing it is to resist or to neglect the Spirit of God, and the day of grace! [Is. 42. 3.] Prov. 1. 24, 26.

Let us lay all this together, and to heart too.

We are by nature born in sin, in which we should live and die, without God's help and mercy. We are by baptism made the children of grace and favour. To all that are so, the Holy Spirit is given, to enlighten their minds with saving truth, to lead them in the ways of virtue and holiness, to protect them against their spiritual enemies, to comfort them under all adversities, and to bring them safe to heaven.

In order to these great ends, the Holy Ghost has given them a rule to walk by, namely, THE HOLY SCRIPTURES,—THE WORD OF GOD. And that they may trust to that rule, He has confirmed it by many great miracles.

He has also appointed a certain order of men, who, under the severest penalties, are faithfully to preach this Word unto His people, and He has promised to bless their labours. To encourage men to give ear unto them, they are by the Holy Ghost impowered to promise all such as shall obey that Word, the blessings of this life and of that which is to come.

And, that men may be afraid to neglect these gracious offers, they are directed to set before the people the terrible danger of doing so, and that it is a dreadful thing for a sinner to fall into the hands of the living GOD, who can destroy both body and soul in hell.

SERM. LXXIV.

All such as lay these things to heart, and are desirous of serving God, and of saving their souls, the Holy Ghost is ever ready to assist them, by putting into their minds good desires, by enabling them to do what He has made them willing to do, by giving them opportunities of learning and performing their duty, by succouring them when they are tempted to sin, and by encouraging and cheering their hearts, when they have overcome temptations; from time to time increasing His favours as they make good use of them, until they come to heaven, when all danger shall be over.

On the other hand; all such as have been dedicated to God in baptism, and, when they come to years of discretion, do not seriously think of what it is to be a Christian; or do not embrace and close with the means of grace afforded them; such persons have no possible way of escaping the dangers of a sinful world, the temptations of a powerful evil spirit, or the miseries of a future life.

Therefore, it behoves every man who hopes to be saved, (and who is there that does not?) it concerns every man to consider, what it is he is a doing, when he neglects or resists the Holy Ghost calling him to repentance and newness of life. That he is taking himself from under God's protection, and putting himself into the service of the devil; that he cannot go back when he pleases into the service of God, no more than he can go to heaven without the leave of God; that the wisest man cannot tell where he shall stop, what he shall do, when once he ventures to leave the ways of religion, and the means of grace afforded him in the Church of God.

And let no man say that he wants grace and strength to do what God expects from him; for God expects no more than an honest use of that measure of grace which He has already bestowed upon a man.

It is not expected from one newly converted, that he should be perfect, that he should never fall into sinful courses; but this is expected from him, that he should avoid all occasions (as much as possible) and temptations to sin; that he should earnestly pray for grace and the fellowship of the Holy Ghost; that whenever he falls he should speedily return to God by repentance, and make new resolutions of obedience. And whoever does this in good earnest, is in

the way of salvation, and under the conduct of the Spirit of God.

From whence we may conclude, (and I pray God all that are concerned may take notice, and lay it to heart,) that every person who often falls into the same sins, and does not strive against them, avoid temptation, pray to God for help; that such persons may justly apprehend that they are not in the way of salvation.

To conclude the whole: here is all the encouragement our hearts can desire to turn to God. He will forgive us what is past; He will enable us for the time to come; He will help us when we fall; and He will make us happy when we die. Why then should we put off our repentance? Is it because we purpose never to become new men? O, no; the hardiest sinner amongst us dare not resolve never to amend.

But then let us remember, that it is not when we please, but when the Holy Ghost pleases, that we shall repent and turn to God; and if the Holy Ghost stirs in us a desire of doing so, and we neglect that desire or inclination, if we do this often, we have much reason to fear He will leave us to ourselves, and then it will be impossible for us ever to repent.

Therefore, if there be any of you, who are sensible that you have hitherto lived a careless, unchristian life; if you are afraid of what will follow, and do wish that you had taken up sooner; if you are convinced that the judgments of God against sinners are terrible and true, and do seriously wish that you were in a safer condition; then consider, that these being thoughts tending towards repentance, are from the good Spirit of God; that none of His motions are in vain, but when people wilfully oppose them, or refuse to hear the voice of God.

What then have you to do? God Himself directs you; "To-day, if you will hear His voice, harden not your hearts;" resolve, that by the help of God, you will from this moment do what you can to save your soul; that you will pray to God to direct, to assist, and to bless your endeavours, and do what you resolve; and be assured the Holy Ghost will be with you, to guide, to help, and to comfort you. [Ps. 95. 8; Heb. 3. 7.]

Whoever amongst us has hopes towards God, and believes

SERM LXXIV.

himself in the way of life, ought to consider, that when the Scripture speaks of grieving the Holy Spirit, it does intimate to us, that it is possible for us to do such things as may force Him from us.

Our duty then is, to be careful of our ways; and, as we hope for salvation, not to dare to continue in the practice of any known vice; but if we are overtaken, to ask ourselves this question,—Is this sin I have been guilty of consistent with my hopes of mercy at the great day? It is not; and therefore I must part with it, or part with my hopes of heaven.

And be assured, he that dares not thus reason with his heart is not yet well in love with a Christian life, but is in danger of being disappointed of his hopes of heaven.

From what has been said, you see what God has done for us, before we were able to do any thing for ourselves.

He has received us into covenant, given us His holy Word and Sacraments, made us many great and precious promises, and set before us the dreadful consequence of neglecting them.

You see likewise, that *now* something is to be done by us, that we may secure the favour and assistance of this Holy Spirit.

We must keep ourselves pure and undefiled members of Christ's Church: we must not drive Him from us, by any wicked course of sinning; and we must omit no opportunities of growing in grace, which God has appointed and shall afford us: we must read or hear His holy Word: we must take care to keep holy such days as are set apart for His service: we must go constantly to His house, and constantly acknowledge our dependence upon Him, by praying to God for what we want, and by giving Him thanks for what we receive: and we must be sure to receive the holy Sacrament of the Lord's Supper, which is the strength and refreshment of our souls, and is therefore in an especial way called *a means of grace.*

Now, if we do these things as we ought, with an honest heart, these will be the effects:

First; we shall be very humble, knowing that we have nothing of our own to boast of: for if I differ from another,

it is the Holy Ghost that has made the difference; we being all equally born in sin, and all equally liable to be overrun with it.

Secondly; we shall be very careful of our ways, remembering, that we are under the direction and government of a Holy Spirit, who will be grieved to see us thoughtless and negligent when our immortal souls lie at stake.

Lastly; we shall be very thankful that God is pleased to accept and save us upon any terms. But that His good Spirit will ever be present with us, to keep us in the way we should go, to pull us back when we go wrong, to defend us against our powerful enemies, to support, to comfort, and at all times to succour us: this ought to create in us such a sense of gratitude as we are not able to express, but by an entire obedience to His commands.

And may that blessed Spirit, from whom cometh every good and perfect gift, rest upon us and dwell with us for ever, preserving us in the unity of the Church; continuing to us the means of grace; removing far from us all ignorance, hardness of heart, and contempt of God's Word; that we may, with patience and comfort, run the race that is set before us; stedfastly believing, that all things shall work together for good to those that fear God, through Jesus Christ our Lord.

To Whom, with the Father and the Holy Ghost, be all honour and glory, world without end. Amen.

SERMON LXXV.

THE LORD'S SUPPER THE MEDICINE OF THE SOUL.

MARK vi. 56.

As many as touched Him were made whole.

THE whole verse is as followeth: "Whithersoever Jesus entered, into villages, or cities, or country, they laid the sick in the streets, and besought Him that they might touch, if it were but the border of His garment; AND AS MANY AS TOUCHED HIM WERE MADE WHOLE."

What a blessed opportunity had these people of being healed of all their diseases! How happy did they think themselves in having Jesus Christ present amongst them! How good and kind was He, to go from one place to another, that every body who had a desire to be healed, and who had faith in His power, *might be made whole!*

We cannot but esteem this a mighty blessing, and wish it were our own case. Why now, my Christian brethren, it *is* our own case, and to much greater purposes. And we should certainly be convinced of it, if we were but as sensible of our spiritual disorders, as these people were of the diseases of their bodies; and we should, with as much zeal and faith in His power and readiness to help us, we should apply to Him, now He is in heaven, as earnestly as these people did when He was on earth and amongst them.

All that we want is, *to feel our disorders*, and to see the danger we are in without His help; for then we should, with thankful hearts, accept of the sovereign medicine which He has prescribed for the cure of all our maladies.

Well then, how may we become sensible of our disorders and danger? Let every one, who desires to know this, look

into his own heart, and ask himself some such questions as these: Do I love with all my heart the God who made me, who preserves and gives me all that I want, or enjoy, or hope for? Do I fear to offend Him, who, for my own good, has given me rules to live by, and has assured me, that if I do not observe those rules, I shall lose His favour, and deprive myself of greater happiness than all this world can give me?

The true answer *must* be this: I find myself prone to evil continually. Of myself I am not able to resist the temptations to sin that I meet with. I do many things which my own conscience tells me *I ought not to do*, and I omit very many duties which I owe to God my Maker, to my neighbour, and to myself. I cannot but be sensible that I do not love God as I ought to do. I have not had that regard to His commands that so great a Majesty demands of me. I have received infinite mercies and favours from His goodness, and have never thanked Him for them. I have, times without number, broken His commands, without fearing what must follow. I have little minded what His own Son has made known to us,—that a day is coming when God will judge the world in righteousness, according to our behaviour in this life; and that they that have done good shall go into life and happiness everlasting, and they that have done evil, and have not timely repented, shall go into everlasting fire.

This I have heard a thousand times, without being awakened, or bettered by it; I cannot but see that every day brings me nearer death; that death is the end of my trial in this life, and that after that there is no repentance.

Jesus Christ in His holy Gospel assures us, that, the moment we die, our souls are carried to places of happiness or misery, according as our lives have been spent here, there to remain till the judgment of the great day.

Now, who is there that hears and understands this, who does not know that every syllable of this is true? For these are not the sayings of men, but THE WORDS OF GOD, the God of truth, who cannot deceive His creatures, but would have all men to repent, and to come to the knowledge of the truth, and of their own interest.

SERM. LXXV.

And can any man hear these truths, and apply them to himself, without seeing that this is his own case; without seeing the danger he is in without some help besides his own; and without laying hold of that help that is offered him by a merciful Saviour and Physician of our souls?

Do but look back to the text, and the history set before you for your consideration and pattern. All that found themselves sick and in danger, made no delay, lest they should lose so good an opportunity of being healed of their infirmities. Wherever Jesus Christ came, they saw His power and His mercy to heal poor miserable people, and they besought Him to heal them; and He did so most willingly.

They saw plainly, that without His help they must suffer or die; and they *besought Him*,—they begged of Him,—to heal them of their diseases. And as many as did so were made whole.

Now, my Christian brethren, what have I set this history before you for, but to persuade you to follow the example of these diseased people? Not one soul of us will dare to say, *Nothing ails me—I am in no danger.* "If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us," saith St. John; and so saith every man's own conscience, who will but look inwards.

[1 John 1. 8.]

And what saith the Spirit of Truth in the Gospel?—*No wicked person can enter into the kingdom of heaven*,—can inherit eternal life,—but shall be sent into outer darkness, "where there shall be weeping, and wailing, and gnashing of teeth."

[Gal. 5. 21; Eph. 5. 5; Matt. 25. 30.]

Now, can any sinner, can any man who knows any thing of himself, be easy under the belief and thoughts of this, until he knows whether there be any help for him or not?

Here therefore is seen the blessing of Christianity, which offers, which has provided, a remedy for all our disorders, and for all our fears. "The blood of Jesus Christ cleanseth us from all sin," saith the Holy Spirit by St. John; and our Lord Christ Himself says, "Verily, all sins shall be forgiven unto men;" that is, unto those who are weary and heavy laden with the burden of their sins; who confess and forsake their sins, and, through faith in His blood, beseech

[1 John 1. 7; Matt. 12. 31.]

Him to help, and to heal them; and this with that sincere desire and earnestness, that these sick people desired to touch if it were but the border of His garment, and were thereby made whole.

This will lead us to consider, how Jesus Christ has appointed us to apply to Him for His help, and the cure of our disorders.

For though He is gone into heaven, yet He is still ready, and has promised to heal all the diseases of our souls, when we apply to Him, out of a true sense of our sad condition without His help and mercy.

Jesus Christ, while He was on earth, had told His disciples and followers, that He was "the bread of life," *the life-giving bread,* "which came down from heaven, which if any man should eat, he should live for ever." That "this bread is His flesh, which He would give for the life of the world." He adds, "Verily, verily, I say unto you, Except ye eat the flesh of the Son of Man, and drink His blood, ye have no life in you. Whoso eateth My flesh, and drinketh My blood, hath eternal life; and I will raise him up at the last day." John 6. 51, &c.

These were then indeed strange sayings to His followers. Some said, *How can this man give us His flesh to eat?* Others were offended, and departed from Him. But when His time came, that He was to die, and to become a sacrifice for the sins of the world, He explained Himself to His Apostles, when He appointed that ordinance or sacrament, which is called THE LORD'S SUPPER. For then He took bread, and having blessed it, he gave it to His disciples, and said, "This is My body, which is given for you." And of the wine He said, "This is My blood, which is shed for you, and for many: EAT THE ONE, AND DRINK THE OTHER, IN REMEMBRANCE OF ME." [Matt. 26. 26, &c.; Luke 22. 19; 1 Cor. 11. 23, &c.]

Then they understood, that when before He had spoken of eating His flesh and drinking His blood, as necessary to eternal life, He did not mean it in such a manner as they then understood it, but in a spiritual manner, as He now explained it; namely, that Christ is our life,—the food of our souls,—in this sacrament. As common bread is the food of our bodies, so this is the support of our spiritual life.

He therefore ordained this sacrament to be for ever ob-

SERM. LXXV.

served by all Christians, not only as a testimony of His great love in laying down His life for His poor creatures; but as a way by which He would communicate to them all the blessings He had by His death obtained for them; *the pardon of their sins in this world, and eternal life after death.*

Happy therefore will all those be, who, after the example of these sick and diseased people, being sensible of their infirmities and danger, do go to Him for help, and take all opportunities of going by faith to the Physician of their souls; He having blessed this very ordinance, for our help and comfort, with a power of healing all our spiritual diseases.

We see, that the very border of His garment, by His blessing, had the virtue to heal all those, that through faith in Him touched it, of all their bodily infirmities. And shall we doubt the blessed effects of this holy ordinance to every worthy communicant, to procure for him the favour of God, the pardon of his sins, the assistance of God's Holy Spirit, and *eternal life* and *happiness* after death?

God forbid we should any of us doubt this! God can affix and join His blessings and helps to whatever He pleaseth. By His appointment, the common waters of Jordan healed Naaman the Syrian. By His appointment, a brazen serpent healed all those that were bitten, only by looking upon it with faith in God's commandment. By the very shadow of St. Peter, many, we are assured, were healed of their diseases. And here, as many as touched our Saviour's garment were made whole.

[2 Kings 5. 14; Numb. 21. 9; Acts 5. 15.]

And it is thus that the two sacraments become means of salvation to all such as with faith receive them. The *Water* in Baptism, with the blessing and grace of God, has power in it to cleanse us from our sins. And the *Bread* in the Lord's Supper, being set apart and blessed, becomes the bread that nourisheth to eternal life.

Why then does any Christian neglect this sovereign medicine? It is every where to be met with, as Jesus Christ Himself was when He was on earth. Wherever Christians live, whether in *villages*, or *cities*, or *towns*, or *country*, they may have this blessed cure of their disorders, if it is not their own fault.

Our Lord Himself gives us the true reason why people are not sensible of *this* mercy which is offered them: *They that be whole, that do not feel their disorders, and danger, will not be persuaded that they need a physician, but they that are sick. These,* and *these* only will be glad of and look out for help. [Matt. 9. 12.]

For my own part, I am not ashamed to confess, that were it not for the blood of Christ, offered us in this holy ordinance; were it not through faith in His blood; I should never dare to apply to the great God for the pardon of my sins, for the assistance of His grace to keep me from ruining myself for ever. My own *reason,* my own *power,* would no more help me, or keep me from ruining myself, than these would keep a new-born child from perishing, if it were left to itself.

And this I am sure is the case of every man living, of every soul that hears me. We have every one of us the seed of every evil, of every sin, we ever heard of, lodged in our corrupt nature, ready to spring out upon every suitable temptation, if not hindered by the grace or providence of God.

When we hear that such a man has robbed or murdered his neighbour, we wonder at it. Why, not one of us but would have done the same, had we been left wholly to ourselves and to the temptation of the devil, and had the same occasion offered us, and God had not interposed His grace or His providence to hinder us.

We easily see, and are very ready to censure, other people's faults. Such a man, we cry, is *covetous;* such a man is *unjust;* such a man is *litigious;* such a man is a *drunkard;* such a man is an *adulterer;* such a man is a *common swearer:* though all these must know that God has forbidden every one of these sins, upon pain of damnation.

You do not consider why these people have fallen into these damnable sins, and why you yourself have not perhaps done so; but it is fit you should know why you have not: for, be assured of it, let a man be never so *learned,* never so *wise* in his own opinion, never so *cautious,* never so *resolved* against any or all of these sins; yet if he shall provoke God to leave him to himself; if he shall despise those means which God has appointed to keep us under His especial

SERM. LXXV.

favour and protection; there is not one of these sins but he is liable to fall into. And this is the reason why the Spirit of God has given us all, even the best of us, this caution:—

[1 Cor. 10. 12.] "Let him that thinketh he standeth, take heed lest he fall."

Will any one of us, after this, if this be true (*as we are sure it is*), will any man say, I hope I am in no such great danger. I have no such ailments to be cured of. I hope I shall be governed by reason, my own sense of what is good and evil will keep me from such unworthy, from such destructive and shameful vices. *God help him that thinks so!* Indeed, God *must* help you, or your danger is greater, your maladies and disorders are more deadly than you are aware of.

And were it not for the wonderful love of our blessed Redeemer, in laying down His life as a sacrifice for our sins, and restoring us to the favour of an offended God; if He had not appointed these means of grace, by which we can plead before God, that His *own Son* has redeemed us from the power of the devil, if it be not our own fault; if *He* had not obtained for us the assistance of an all-powerful Spirit, to direct and assist us, *not one soul of us would be saved.*

And now, if after what has been said, and I hope believed (for we dare not say any thing but what Christ has commanded us to say and speak); if, after what you have heard, you are not sensible that your disorders are *many* and *great*, and of very dangerous consequences if not cured; there is no help for it, *you must perish.*

This is not what our merciful God and Saviour designed, when He appointed this holy sacrament to be observed by all that hope for salvation through His merits. He laid down His life, to convince all mankind that their souls were in danger, without His grace and help. He appointed this service, that they might not forget their danger; and that they might have a cure for their diseases, and their fears. Whoever will not accept of this remedy, there is no hope left for him: this being the only remedy for our sins, which are the diseases of our souls; the only medicine to obtain our pardon and the grace of God, to mend the corruption of our nature, to increase and to confirm our faith, without which it will be impossible to please God, or to be made whole.

In short; this is the only medicine to supply the graces we want,—the bread by which the life and health of our souls is to be preserved. It is as much the support of our souls, as common bread is the food and support of our bodies.

These, and many more, are the blessings which every Christian may expect, who goes worthily to the Lord's Table.

But who, some will say, can be sure that he shall be a worthy communicant? Let a man sincerely purpose and strive to amend what he knows to be amiss in himself; let him sincerely purpose and strive to lead a Christian life for the time to come; let him firmly believe, that, for the sake of what Jesus Christ hath done and suffered for us, *we have peace with God* upon our repentance; let him, with a thankful heart, remember the great goodness of God in giving His only Son for His sinful and otherwise lost creatures; and let him remember the sufferings of Christ, in order to redeem mankind from the slavery of sin and Satan; and lastly, let him be as ready to forgive others as God has been to forgive him, and as he hopes for that mercy from God: every such person may humbly hope to be a meet partaker of these holy mysteries, and may return home healed of all his maladies.

In short; let me observe to you, that Jesus Christ, *the great Physician,* comes to our doors, as He did to these people.

All they that were distressed and wanted His help most readily and thankfully applied to Him. There was no need to exhort and press them to go to Him for a cure. They were convinced that there was an healing power in Him to cure them. Their faith in Him cured them of all their diseases: and the same faith in His power, and the same sense of our disorders, and earnest desire to be relieved, will as certainly obtain the help we wish for—*the cure of all our disorders.*

And may the Lord pity and awaken all such, if there be any such, as are so senseless, and blind, as not to see and feel, that they want His help every day of their lives! When once they are sensible of this, they will not need to be told how often they should go to Him for relief. The oftener they go, the better it will be for them, if they go with a sincere desire to be made better.

SERM. LXXV.

And be assured of it, Christians, it is with this spiritual food, as it is with the food of our bodies: a man may fast so long as quite to lose his appetite, and thereby endanger his life: even so, by abstaining from the Lord's Supper, he may forget the wants he labours under, he may forget the want and blessing of a Redeemer, of the Physician of his soul, till he is past cure without a miracle, which he will have no reason to expect.

And now, may all we, who, through the grace of God, desire and purpose to partake of *this blessed medicine of our souls*, be ever prepared to *receive it worthily*, whenever it is offered to us, by resolving, *through God's help and grace*, never to live in any *known sin*, never to act against our conscience, never to neglect the known duties of our calling, but to live in the fear of God, and to pray daily for His pardon and grace to do our duty, and that He may increase and confirm our faith, for His mercy's sake in Jesus Christ, our only Physician and Redeemer.

To Whom, with the Father and the Holy Spirit, be all glory and thanksgiving, now and for ever. Amen

SERMON LXXVI.

THE LORD'S SUPPER PRACTICALLY EXPLAINED.

Doce me, Domine Jesu, sacrum hoc institutum tali sacro modo tractare, et conatus meos gratia tua adeo secunda, ut indignus usus corporis et sanguinis tui judicium meum, aut eorum qui me audient, nunquam aggravet; sed sacrificii tui memores semper digni fieremus participes. Amen.

LUKE xxii. 19.

The words of Jesus Christ when He ordained the Sacrament of the Lord's Supper: *This do in remembrance of Me.* See Deut. 16. 12; John 6. 51, 53, 55; 1 Cor. 10. 16. [chap. 16. 22.]

ST. PAUL concludes his first epistle to the Corinthians with these remarkable words: IF ANY MAN LOVE NOT THE LORD JESUS CHRIST, LET HIM BE ANATHEMA MARANATHA.

Now, if the generality of Christians can hear these words without trembling, it must be either because they do not understand, or they do not consider them. For the meaning and the direction is *this:* if any Christian amongst you shews by his life and behaviour, THAT HE DOES NOT LOVE THE LORD JESUS, let such a man be separated from your communion, as being under the displeasure of Almighty God.

I dare say, that few Christians, when they hear these words, do think themselves at all concerned in them. We are all but too apt to conclude the best for ourselves, and to think it impossible not to love Jesus Christ, by whose merits and mediation we hope to be saved.

But let us not deceive ourselves. Let us rather, every man, ask himself—How is it that I behave myself to my benefactors, and to those whom I do really love? If any

SERM. LXXVI.

man has done me a very great service, if a man has promised me any great favour, I love to speak of him, and of the kindness he has done, or promised me; I often think of him, and with a thankful mind, and I fully resolve never to do any thing which may disoblige him.

Is it thus we love the Lord Jesus Christ? Would to God we could all truly say so. However, let us consider what He has done for us, and see how it will affect our hearts.

When the whole race of mankind was under the displeasure of Almighty God, had forfeited all pretence to immortal happiness, and had become liable to eternal death, Jesus Christ undertook to obtain our pardon, and to restore us to the favour of God.

But the sin had spread so far and wide, that this could not be done without a suitable satisfaction to the justice of God. God had declared, that the disobedience of Adam should be punished with death. His *truth* was at stake, and the offender, and all his posterity, were under His displeasure.

Jesus Christ therefore, moved with compassion for so great a calamity, left the glories of heaven, and took upon Him *our nature*, that, *as man*, He might suffer what our sins had deserved, and that, *as the Son of God*, the satisfaction might be sufficient for the sins of the whole world. In short, He laid down His life for us; and by that most worthy sacrifice, He not only made our peace with God, and delivered us from eternal death; but obtained of God His Father an assurance of eternal life and happiness for all such as would become His faithful servants.

And that such might be distinguished from all others, He appointed an holy ordinance, to preserve the memory of these mighty blessings till His coming again; requiring all His faithful followers, all who expect any benefit by His death, to commemorate the same after the manner He ordained the night before He suffered.

Let us ask our own hearts, does this mercy deserve to be remembered by us? Or will any Christian say, THAT HE LOVES THE LORD JESUS CHRIST, *who will lightly turn his back* upon that holy ordinance, which Christ Himself has appointed, as the most acceptable way of shewing our love

to Him, and our resolution to continue His faithful servants, for His mercies bestowed upon us.

And indeed it was for this reason that Jesus Christ ordained this holy Sacrament, that Christians, being often called upon, and obliged to remember the love of their dying Saviour, His bitter passion, the occasion of His death, the misery they have escaped, and the happiness He has purchased for them, might love Him with all their heart and soul; and that doing this as often as ever they should have an opportunity, their love might increase unto their lives' end.

May not one therefore conclude, without any great uncharitableness, that such as do lightly turn their backs upon this ordinance, DO NOT INDEED LOVE THE LORD JESUS; and that, according to St. Paul's direction, they ought to be ANATHEMA, that is, separated from the communion of the faithful.

And though this would be called great severity at this time, yet this was the practice of the primitive Church, and it was agreeable to the *Law of the Passover,* the great figure of Christ's death, and by God's express command; that is, that whoever did neglect to observe the Passover, in remembrance of their deliverance out of Egypt, THAT SOUL SHOULD BE CUT OFF from among the people of Israel. Numb. 9. 13.

And verily, a Christian, who understands and considers the importance of this ordinance, and is not hindered by some very evil habit, or by having fallen into some scandalous sin, will no more turn his back upon the Lord's Table, than he will dare to deny the God that made him, or the Saviour who redeemed him.

Here are so many reasons to shew the *importance,* the *blessing,* and the *necessity* of observing this ordinance, that it will be needless to urge any more to such as have any true concern for their salvation.

This, therefore, being a duty and ordinance, which every Christian is obliged to as he hopes for salvation, to shew his love of Christ, by commemorating His death after the manner He has appointed, the duty must of necessity be such as every Christian, *even the most unlearned,* is capable of understanding, and performing worthily.

And indeed so it is. For as the most unlearned Israelite

SERM. LXXVI.

under the law, when he was commanded to bring his sacrifice to the altar, to lay his hand upon the head of the beast, confessing his sins over him; as he did very easily understand, that this was to put him in mind, that death was the punishment due to sin, that he himself deserved the death that that creature was going to suffer, that it was great mercy in God that He would accept such a sacrifice for his sin, which yet he had good hopes he would do, since He Himself had ordained it: as he would very easily perceive, that all this was designed, as a very powerful motive, to humble him before God; to give him an abhorrence of sin, which could not be forgiven without the loss of the life of an innocent creature; and lastly, that it was intended to lead him to the love of God, who would be reconciled to him upon such gracious terms: I say, the most ignorant Israelite could understand this end of sacrifices, and perform the duty required of him, as well as the most learned master in Israel.

Lev. 1. 4.

Even so, every Christian, even the most unlearned, is capable of understanding (if it be not plainly his own fault), and of performing, all the duties of a worthy communicant.

For when he is informed, that *this* is the *true Christian sacrifice,* the only means of rendering our persons and all our prayers acceptable to God, of obtaining the pardon of our sins, the assistance of God's grace, and everlasting happiness after death: when he sees that done before his eyes that Jesus Christ Himself did; who, the same night in which He was betrayed, having devoted Himself an offering and a sacrifice to God for the sins of the whole world, did institute this holy Sacrament, by taking bread and wine, and blessing them, and making them, by that blessing, the true representatives of His Body and Blood, in virtue and power, as well as in name:

When he is made sensible, that this service was ordained by Christ Himself, not only as a testimony of His great love for His poor creatures, but as a means whereby He would communicate all the benefits of that death which He was then going to suffer; and by which He would apply the merits of His death to all people and ages of the world:

John 6. 56.

Lastly; when he is assured, even from Christ Himself, that whoso eateth and drinketh *this* His flesh and blood after

this holy manner, dwelleth in Christ and Christ in him; that such a one has a right to eternal life, and that God will raise him up at the last day:

Let a man, I say, be never so unlearned, yet he will easily understand, that he is not to look upon, and receive this bread and wine as common food, but as holy representatives of Christ's Body and Blood, made such by an especial blessing of God; that he is to receive it in remembrance of the death of Christ, and to believe assuredly, that the blessing of God will attend his doing so; for it being God's own ordinance, He cannot but bless *it*, and him who observes it.

And when he is informed, that the Lord Jesus commanded this service to be observed until His coming again, (that is, to judge the world,) he will easily conclude, that he ought to prepare himself against that day, by this holy ordinance, that he may meet his Lord and Judge as a friend, at whose table he has been so often received and entertained.

A Christian, I say again, let him be never so unlearned, will easily see, that this holy Sacrament is most proper to prepare him for that great day, and the account he is then to give; that it is designed to humble him, to bring him to repentance, to make him fearful of offending God, and to make him very thankful for all His mercies.

It will put him often in mind of the sad effects of the fall of man, and of the sin occasioned thereby; since no less a sacrifice than the death of Christ would satisfy the justice of God.

He will easily see what he must expect, if he lives and dies in sin unrepented of, even the severest punishment.

He will easily perceive, that these are blessed opportunities, and never to be lost, of renewing his baptismal covenant, which he knows he has broken, and of making his peace with God.

For he cannot but be convinced, that it must be one of the most prevailing arguments with the Divine Majesty, to represent unto Him the death of His Son, who died to redeem us, and to restore us to His favour, beseeching Him to remember His Son's death in heaven, for our good, as we do on earth in obedience to His command.

And lastly, a Christian, let him be never so unlearned,

SERM. LXXVI.

must know, and be convinced, that the oftener he presents himself before God, to plead His Son's death, in this holy manner, the more pleasing it will be to God, the more graces he will receive from Him, the stronger will be his faith, the surer his hopes, and the firmer his pardon.

He will also very easily see, *what duties are required to make him a worthy receiver of this Sacrament.*

He will understand, for instance, that so solemn a service, and a service upon which his salvation depends, cannot be well performed without some thought and consideration.

And a very little consideration will convince him, that he must confess and forsake those sins, which cost Jesus Christ His life, to prevail with God to pardon them; that he is to go to the Sacrament with a full purpose of leading a Christian life; that if he does so, he may depend upon God's mercy through Jesus Christ; that the remembrance of Christ's death ought to be very dear to him; and that he is bound to forgive, and to love, and to do good to others, since God is so good and so kind to him.

Every Christian must see, and acknowledge, the necessity of these qualifications; and that whoever goes presumptuously to the Lord's Table without them, will receive a *curse,* instead of a *blessing.*

I say, *presumptuously;* that is, without *thought,* without *concern,* and without doing what he is able, to become *a worthy communicant.*

For this is our great comfort, that God expects no more of any man, but that he make an honest use of that measure of grace and light which He has given him.

If a man does so, though he may have his scruples, and his fears, yet he cannot be in danger, no more than a dutiful child can be in danger from a father who sees him doing his best to please him.

But, forasmuch as many are apt to go to the Lord's Table *without due consideration;* and too many do make the trouble of *examining and preparing themselves* a reason for their not going so often as they should do (that is, as often as they have an opportunity); it will be proper to consider, *what preparation is required of those that would go worthily to the Lord's Supper.*

Our Church has indeed given us a *short* and *sure* rule and answer to that question, provided we take pains to understand it; but the truth is, it is too often mistaken, both by those that are *presumptuous,* and by those that are *lazy,* and not disposed to consider.

By the *presumptuous,* it is made a matter of *mere form;* and by the *lazy* it is looked upon as a *burden,* and to be avoided as much as possible. Both these are greatly mistaken, and betray a very great disregard for their own souls. And this we shall plainly see, now we come to consider, *what preparation is required of them who go to the Lord's Supper.*

And the first step to a good preparation is, TO EXAMINE OURSELVES WHETHER WE REPENT US TRULY OF OUR FORMER SINS.

Now, it is to be hoped that every Christian, who has had any tolerable instruction, was, *before he first received this Sacrament,* made sensible of the meaning and design of this ordinance; and that it was intended to give Christians an opportunity of renewing, and laying claim to, that covenant which our gracious God has made with man. Which covenant is, that God, *on His part,* will upon our repentance pardon all our sins, give us all necessary grace and assistance to do what He requires of us, and make us happy for ever, on condition that we, *on our part,* do forsake all our sins; that we sincerely endeavour to avoid every thing that we believe will displease God, and with the same sincerity endeavour to do what He has commanded us.

Any Christian, who was made sensible of this, would easily see, how necessary it was, that he SHOULD EXAMINE HIMSELF before he should presume to receive that Sacrament; that is, *that he should look into the state of his soul,* and see whether he had in any good measure, on his part, observed the conditions of this covenant, whether he had lived a sober and a Christian life.

And forasmuch as a *great deal* depends upon this enquiry, *even the salvation of our souls,* a Christian will not think it too much trouble to examine himself after some such way as this:

Have I considered, that this life is a state of trial; that we are upon our good behaviour, and that we shall be happy

SERM. LXXVI.

or miserable for ever, as we behave ourselves well or ill in this world? that the design of the Christian religion is, to make us holy, that we may be capable of being happy; and that God, who sent me into the world, sent me to glorify Him by an holy life? that He sees all my actions, hears all my words, and knows the very secrets of my heart? that therefore I ought not, at the peril of my soul, to do any thing which I believe will displease Him? that I ought to love God above all things, since it is from Him I expect, and hope, to be made happy? that if I do love Him above all things, I shall always speak of Him with the greatest reverence, honour His *name*, His *word*, His *day*, His *ministers*, and every thing that belongs to Him? and lastly, that I ought to trust in Him, to pray to Him daily, to give Him thanks, and to submit to all His dealings with me?

If I am conscious to myself that I have not considered these things so seriously as I should have done, and consequently, that I have not *feared*, and *loved*, and *honoured*, and *worshipped* this great God, as His majesty and my duty required me to do; why then I shall most humbly beg His pardon, and His gracious assistance, that I may do it better for the time to come.

And forasmuch as I ought to make the law and will of God, as far as it is known to me, the rule of my life and actions, I am bound to examine myself, whether I have really done so? Whether I have not hitherto lived in any known sin; been subject to any evil habit, either of *lying*, or *swearing*, or *intemperance*, or *impurity*, or an idle and an useless life? Whether I do honour my betters, and especially such as have the care of my soul; and do obey the lawful commandments of my superiors? Whether I do indeed love my neighbour, and have neither *injured*, *hurt*, or *wronged* him, in body, goods, or good name; nor taken advantage either of his ignorance or necessities? Whether I have been content with my condition, neither envying that of others, nor endeavouring to better my own by unjust ways?

A Christian, who finds himself faulty in any of these things, will, before he goes to the Lord's Table, sincerely repent of his sin; that is, he will beg God's pardon, and His grace, that he may *know* and *do* his duty more faithfully,

most seriously purposing to lead a *new*, that is, a Christian life.

In order to this, he will take care to avoid all temptations to such sins as he has been most subject to. If through frailty or any violent temptation he happen to fall into sin, he will forthwith confess and forsake it, and be more careful for the future. And, knowing that without God's especial grace all his best purposes will come to nothing, he will be careful to beg that grace and assistance every day of his life.

And that he may be more sensible of the least thing that may displease God, he will endeavour to keep his conscience *tender* and *awake;* and keep a *watch* over himself, that he may not fall into the sins he has repented of.

Now, if this be done sincerely when a person first receives this Sacrament, why then to examine himself every time after is to consider and see whether his life has been answerable to this good beginning?

If so, why then he is, *as to his repentance*, very well qualified to receive the Lord's Supper worthily, as often as he can have an opportunity.

But if, upon looking into the state of his soul, he finds that he has fallen into any wilful sin; that he has been led away by his lusts, and has used no just endeavours to master them, he must, as he hopes for mercy, take care that his repentance be more sincere: that is, he must lay himself under much stricter obligations, he must make his repentance bear some proportion to the sin of *backsliding*, and, by fasting and self-denial, make his return to sin more frightful and uneasy, and a Christian life more welcome, and to be embraced before the ways of sin, which require so painful a remedy, before he can hope for any safety.

The next step to a WORTHY PREPARATION is, *to enquire into the nature of our faith*, WHETHER WE HAVE A LIVELY FAITH IN GOD'S MERCY THROUGH CHRIST. A *lively faith;* that is, a faith which purifies the heart, a faith which produces *obedience* and *good works;* for that is the very life of faith, "Faith without works being dead." [James 2. 20.]

Now, God's mercies to man through Jesus Christ are, *forgiveness of sins* to all that truly repent of them, the *assist-*

SERM. LXXVI.

ance of His Holy Spirit to all such as do not grieve Him by their evil deeds, and a sure *promise of eternal life and happiness* to such as keep His commandments.

A man may indeed think that he believes these promises of God in Christ; but certainly he does but deceive his own heart, if his faith has not its natural fruits, which are, a *sincere repentance*, in hopes of pardon, an *holy life*, which alone can secure the fellowship of the Holy Spirit, and such an *earnest desire* after eternal life and happiness, as puts a man upon his best endeavours to attain them.

When a Christian, therefore, in order to prepare himself for the Lord's Supper, would examine into the truth of his faith, he ought to ask himself such questions as these: Has God's promise of pardon upon my repentance produced in me *amendment of life?* Do I find that I have been governed by God's good Spirit, by the assistance He has given me to lead a new, that is, a Christian life? And lastly, have I not been diverted from labouring after eternal life, by the false appearances of happiness which we meet with here?

Any Christian, who will but ask himself such questions as these, will easily know whether his *faith in the mercies of God through Christ* be such as it should be; that is, whether his faith has had its saving effects. If so, then he is always prepared for this holy ordinance.

The next enquiry a Christian is to make is, WHETHER HE HAS A THANKFUL REMEMBRANCE AND SENSE OF CHRIST'S DEATH? And indeed, whoever will but consider how very sad our condition must needs be, when no less a sacrifice would satisfy the justice of our offended God, and restore us to His favour, than the death of His own Son: whoever considers this, cannot but remember *that death* with a very thankful heart; since, on account of that sacrifice, God is pleased to overlook the untowardness of our nature, to forgive us our sins, to look upon us as His children, to give us all the assistance we shall want; and, if we behave ourselves as becomes His children, He will, for His sake, make us happy for ever.

In short, Jesus Christ, by His death, has redeemed us from damnation. Whoever considers the meaning of that word, cannot but be very thankful. But then let us at the

same time remember, that, as we hope for any benefit by His death, we must suffer Him to redeem us from this present evil world, to make us holy, that we may become worthy to escape so great a misery.

The last enquiry which a Christian ought to make is this: WHETHER HE BE IN CHARITY WITH ALL MEN? And a very necessary enquiry this will appear to be, when we remember, that our acceptance with God, and our salvation, depend upon our having such a good-will towards all men, as becomes members of the same family, of the same body, of the same hope and faith.

Every serious Christian will therefore, before he goes to the Lord's Table, ask himself some such questions as these: Do I know of any person to whom I bear any grudge or ill-will? Is there any person whom I have wronged, and to whom I ought to make satisfaction, as far as I am able? Have I any enemies, for whom I cannot and do not pray, and am not disposed to be reconciled to, and to forgive them? Am I ready to shew mercy and kindness to men, that I may be entitled to, and receive mercy from God? Do I pretend to value my soul, and think this too hard a condition?

I will therefore most gladly close with this condition of pardon which Jesus Christ has ordained; I will pray that God will inspire me with the grace of a forgiving temper; that I may live in union, peace, and charity, with all the world.

And now, Christians, you will easily understand who they are that go unworthily to the Lord's Table; and who bring judgments upon themselves by doing so. Even all such as have no true sense of the blessing of a Redeemer, and consequently no true value or love for Jesus Christ; all such as live in any known sin; all such as are not sincerely resolved to live, and be governed, by the laws of God; all such as live at variance with their neighbours; all such as have done wrong, and do not make restitution and satisfaction according to their power; lastly, all such as go to the Sacrament in mere compliance with the laws and custom, without considering the ends and benefits of receiving: all such go unworthily to the Lord's Table, and return without a blessing.

SERM. LXXVI.

But that is not the worst. They bring an evil report upon the ordinances of God, as if no good, no grace, attended them. They harden sinners, confirm infidels, and bring down certain judgments upon themselves.

In short; it is according to the love that we have for Jesus Christ, according to the care we take to obey His commands, according to the sense we have of our deliverance by Him, from sin and hell, according to the love we have for all whom He has redeemed, for all His household and family, that we are *worthy* or *unworthy* communicants.

And this will best appear, not by the dispositions only with which we go to the Sacrament, but by the life we lead afterwards. For what an horrid crime must it be, to go to the Lord's Table, as Judas did, in order to betray our Lord! Or as those unthoughtful Jews did, who spread their garments before Him, and *owned* and *proclaimed* Him for their Messiah, and five days after called out to have Him crucified!

And so surely do they, who blaspheme God with the same mouth which a while ago received the pledges of His love in the blessed Sacrament, and pretended to give Him thanks for this great instance of His love to mankind.

So do *they*, who, forgetting all the *resolutions*, the *promises*, and *vows* they made at the altar, return again to their usual liberties; and having, as they vainly suppose, cleared off all old scores, go on, without any scruple, to contract new ones, in hopes of having them easily forgiven the next time they shall go to the Lord's Supper.

But, O blessed Jesus, was this *Thy* design in appointing this holy ordinance? Was it to encourage sinners to hope for pardon without amendment of life? Was it for *this* Thou sheddest Thy most precious blood, that men might sin with greater security?

O, no! But it was to convince us, how hateful sin is to God; how unqualified sinners are for heaven and happiness; how dreadful the condition of those is, who die in their sins unrepented of. It was to convince us of these truths and of Thine infinite concern for lost mankind, that Thou, O Christ, becamest a sacrifice for us; to restore us to the favour of our offended God, to prevail with God to accept of our

repentance, to oblige us to live like people who hope for heaven, and to obtain for us the grace and power to do so.

It was, to make us ever mindful of these mercies, and to preserve the memory of Thy death; and to give us an opportunity of pleading the merits thereof before God, for the pardon of our sins, and for grace to amend where we had done amiss.

It was for these reasons, that Thou, O Saviour, didst ordain this holy Sacrament to be administered and received by all Christians till Thy coming again to judgment.

How great then must the sin of those be, who neglect to administer, and of those who turn their backs upon, this holy ordinance!

We may indeed do as Naaman did, when the prophet bid him go and wash himself in Jordan. We may question whether an action so plain and easy can possibly be attended with so many and great blessings; and we may, through our infidelity, lose all those blessings, as he would have done, had he not been better advised. [2 Kings 5. 11—13.]

But Christians, who have any consideration and love for their own souls, will *not lightly esteem*, or *turn their backs upon*, this holy ordinance; because if they know any thing, they must know, that their salvation depends upon it; "and that it is this blood of Christ which cleanseth us from all sin;" that we can hope for no share in the merits of Jesus Christ, but by closing with this means of grace which He has ordained; that the *Lord's Supper* is to Christians what the *tree of life* was to Adam in paradise; and that as he, when for his transgression he was deprived of that food which was designed to make him immortal, as he was left in his pure natural condition, utterly unable to attain eternal life; even so shall we, if we partake not of *this food*, THIS BREAD OF LIFE, as our Lord calls it. We are no more capable of attaining heaven and happiness, than he was of returning to paradise after he was cast out. 1 John 1. 7.

The reason is plain: without a supernatural grace, no mortal man can attain to a supernatural state and condition. This grace is given us in baptism, as the tree of life was to Adam, and can only be preserved by obeying this command of Jesus Christ. For, saith He, "Except ye John 6. 53.

SERM. LXXVI.

eat the flesh," the sacramental flesh, "of the Son of Man, and drink His blood," His sacramental blood, "ye have no life in you;" that is, nothing but this can sustain the divine life of a Christian.

In short, this is the only way to continue in covenant with God; that is, to be one of His family, one of His care, under His especial protection; one who has a promise of and a right to the kingdom of heaven, by virtue of this covenant.

1 Cor. 10. 16.

St. Paul styles this Sacrament THE COMMUNION OF THE BODY OF CHRIST; that is, it is that ordinance by which we have fellowship with Jesus Christ and with all His members. By this we own to all the world, that we belong to Christ. And then let us remember, that if we do not belong to Christ, we do belong to a much worse master.

John 15. 4.

"The branch," saith our Lord, "The branch cannot bear fruit of itself, unless it abide in the vine: no more can ye, except ye abide in Me." Now, can any thing render Christ more effectually present with, and united to us, than this ordinance; whereby we are made one with Christ, and Christ with us?

The paschal lamb was to the Israelites what this Sacrament is to Christians. There was no hopes of security for any Israelite, who had not the blood of the Lamb upon his door, and who did not ever after keep up the memory of his deliverance by that sacrifice. And will Christians hope for mercy without doing what Christ has ordained in memory of His death, and our much greater deliverance?

And remember this, I beseech you, for a certain truth: that generally speaking, whatever it is that hinders people from going to the Sacrament will hinder them from going to heaven. Such are these: a careless indifference for their soul's welfare; an unwillingness to look into their spiritual estate; a great love for the world and its idols, and an unwillingness to renounce them; a faint purpose of doing it some time or other.

These are too often the true causes of men's turning their backs upon this holy ordinance, or of coming to it with an indifference and indevotion which betrays the want of a true sense of the blessings which they might receive from it.

May God Almighty grant, that all who now come to partake of this holy Sacrament may receive the remission of all their past sins, be confirmed in all goodness, receive all the graces necessary for their present condition, may be filled with the gifts of the Holy Ghost, and receive this holy Sacrament as a pledge, as an earnest, of a blessed resurrection, and of a life eternal, for Jesus Christ's sake, whose death we now commemorate. To Whom, with the Father and the Holy Ghost, be all honour and glory, dominion and power, now and for ever.

SERMON LXXVII.

A FREQUENT RECEIVING OF THE LORD'S SUPPER RECOMMENDED AND ENFORCED.

1 Cor. xi. 26.

For as often as ye eat this bread, and drink this cup, ye do shew the Lord's death till He come.

It will hardly be expected that I should say any thing upon these words, or upon *this subject,* that has not been said before; neither indeed is it necessary. If we can so represent the duties of Christianity, as that they may be apprehended by all sorts of hearers, and that they be often and seasonably put in mind of them, it is all that the ministers of Christ can do.

Our meeting now is in order to be instructed concerning the meaning, the nature, and ends, of the Sacrament of the Lord's Supper. Those that have lived in the faithful use of this ordinance will not expect any further information; the rest will only hear what every Christian should know.

I am verily persuaded there is no Christian, who seriously hopes to be saved, that would ever lightly turn his back on the holy Sacrament, if he *understood and considered* the meaning, the necessity, and the advantage of receiving worthily; and that there is no danger of receiving unworthily, if a man does but come with an honest heart, and purposes to serve God to the best of his understanding and power.

Now, to lay this matter plainly before you, is what, by God's good blessing, I shall endeavour to do at this time. And though I am not sure that I shall satisfy every body that hears me, yet I do believe, that every person of the

most ordinary understanding, who shall seriously attend to what I am going to say, and who heartily desires to be informed concerning this duty, will be convinced of the truth of *these following particulars:*

First; that to receive the Sacrament of the Lord's Supper, is one of the most necessary duties of the Christian religion.

Secondly; that as the receiving of the Lord's Supper is a necessary duty, so it is one of the easiest to be understood by any person who in good earnest desires to be saved.

Thirdly; that as it is most easy to be understood, so it may be worthily and safely received by the most unlearned Christian, to his great and endless comfort.

Lastly; that therefore, generally speaking, whatever it is that hinders people from coming to the Sacrament, will likewise hinder them from going to heaven.

I. To begin with the first of these particulars: *that to receive the Sacrament of the Lord's Supper is one of the most necessary duties of the Christian religion.* Now, in order to make this appear, I observe,

First, that the knowledge and remembrance of Christ's death is that on which all the other duties of Christianity depend.

The reason why we confess our sins to God, and hope for pardon, is, because we remember that "we are reconciled to God by the death of His Son;" and that "the blood of Christ cleanseth us from all sin." Rom. 5. 10. 1 John 1. 7.

We hope for good at the hand of God, but then it is because we call to remembrance, "that He who spared not His own Son, but hath given Him up for us all, will with Him freely give us all things." [Rom. 8. 32.]

In a word; we should neither have hearts to look up to God, nor confidence to expect any thing from Him, nor grace to be thankful, but that Christ, by His death, has given us a right to do so. And therefore His death we ought ever to have before our eyes.

Secondly; the remembrance of Christ's death in the Sacrament is the only support of sinful men. It is not indeed every body that is sensible of the blessing of a Redeemer; but if once men come to consider seriously that they are sinners, and to believe in earnest that no sinner can go to

SERM. LXXVII.

heaven, without a share in the merits of Christ, they will then know for a truth, that there is no rest for their souls, but by coming to Christ, and thankfully using the means of grace which He has appointed.

It may be, that people may think that the death of Christ may be remembered without receiving the Lord's Supper; but they ought to consider, that there is a great deal of difference betwixt knowing that Christ died for mankind, and applying that knowledge to one's-self in particular. For the death of Christ is only a comfort to any person, so far as he can hope that He died for him; that is, so far as he knows that he hath done what Christ hath commanded him to do, in order to be pardoned.

I have seen many instances of this truth. I have seen people under great affliction of mind, doubting the pardon of their sins. And though the Gospel of Christ, and the express promises therein contained, have been laid before them; namely, that "if we confess our sins, God is faithful (to His promise), and just to forgive us our sins: that all that believe in Him shall not perish, but have everlasting life." Yet these promises could yield them no comfort; not that they doubted the truth of them, but because God did not, for that time, vouchsafe them grace to apply these promises to themselves.

[1 John 1. 9; John 3. 16.]

The case was just thus with the people of Israel. They were stung by serpents; Moses was ordered by God to set up a serpent of brass, with a promise, that whoever in their misery should look upon it, should be healed. It was indeed a general blessing to know this; but nobody had any comfort or share in this blessing, but those that made use of the means, and went out to look upon it; *they only* were healed.

[Numb. 21. 6—9.]

Why now let us apply this: we are sinners. Every man knows this for himself. Jesus Christ came into the world to save sinners. For *His* sake, God has made us many great and precious promises. The holy Sacrament is the means of applying these promises to every man's own case, by remembering the death of Christ after a solemn manner, and owning Him for our Lord.

Now, whoever neglects to do what Christ hath com-

manded, will not surely expect those mercies and favours which He has promised in order to obtain them. But,

Thirdly, the receiving of the Lord's Supper is a most necessary duty, because it is the only means of continuing in covenant with God.

People do not consider what it is to be in covenant with God; that it is to be one of His Church and family: to be under God's especial protection and government; to have a right and title to the kingdom of heaven.

Now, are these blessings to be despised? And yet how many are there, who would rather die than expressly renounce the Christian religion, who do in truth renounce all its blessings, by despising the means of grace appointed by Christ?

Let me therefore recommend one thing to your serious consideration. Whoever holds not communion with Christ is under the government of the devil; and therefore the Gospel is said to turn men from Satan to God; that is, to take them from under his government and service, to make them God's servants, and to put them under His especial protection. Acts 26. 18.

Now, to neglect the Lord's Supper is in a manner to renounce communion with Christ. "The bread which we break, is it not the communion of the body of Christ?" That is, is it not that action by which we declare to all the world that we belong to Christ? 1 Cor. 10. 16.

Lastly; the necessity of this duty appears from the necessity of keeping up the remembrance of the death of Christ in the Church of God.

Why, could the world ever forget the sufferings of Christ, and the reasons of His sufferings? Yes; as well as the children of Israel could forget the wonders which God had done for them. Nay, they forgat God Himself, as well as His mercies. And indeed we know not what we should forget, if we should once forsake the ordinances of God.

We know, by faith, "that God made of one blood all nations of the earth;" all which sprang from one who knew the true God, and taught his children how to serve Him; and yet there are many whole nations where the true God is neither known nor worshipped. Acts 17. 26.

SERM. LXXVII.

But we need not go so far for examples. Are there not persons who, by forsaking the laws of God, forget that they are Christians, and live like heathens: forget that they are men, and live like beasts? Therefore God, who knows our frailties, has in great mercy commanded us to remember the blessings of Christ's death, by a way easy to be understood, easy to be performed, and yet dangerous to be neglected.

II. Now, that *the receiving of the Lord's Supper is one of the easiest duties to be understood,* is what I next come to shew.

Though people for the most part own, that to receive the Sacrament is a necessary duty, because it is a means of grace and salvation, and they know that to expect salvation without using the means is not reasonable; yet they look upon it as a duty very hard to be understood; and this is often to them a reason for not setting about this duty. They have a reverence for this Sacrament, but then it is such a reverence as they have for some great prince, of whom they never expect to know more than the name.

Now, I will endeavour to shew you, that there is nothing required to be known concerning the Sacrament of the Lord's Supper, but what any person of the most ordinary understanding, who does but desire to know his duty, may comprehend, and that without much study or learning.

To satisfy you that it *must* be so, do but consider, that the Lord's Supper is a pledge to assure us of the love of God for all mankind; that Jesus Christ, who appointed this Sacrament for the benefit *of all mankind,* knew that the greatest part of men were unlearned, and not able to understand, or remember, any thing that is difficult; that therefore He must require such things as well-meaning persons, without much learning and study, might know; or else the greatest part of men could never know their duty. And indeed so it is in this very Sacrament. There is nothing required by Christ to be known, but what any serious person may know, to the salvation of his soul, as well as the most learned.

When Jesus Christ was going to be made a sacrifice for the sins of the whole world, He ordained this Sacrament to keep up the perpetual memory of His precious death until His coming again. Hear the very words of Christ Himself by His

Apostle St. Paul: "The Lord Jesus, the same night that He was betrayed, took bread: and when He had given thanks, He brake it, and said, Take, eat; this is My body, which is broken for you: this do in remembrance of Me." 1 Cor. 11. 23, 24.

Now, what is there in this command that requires much learning to understand? Does not every body at first sight apprehend, that that which is required of Christians *is*, to meet together, to break and eat bread after a religious manner; that is, with prayer and thanksgiving; to do this in remembrance of Christ's death; and to believe assuredly, that God's blessing will attend their doing so?

Here seems to be no difficulty in this, and yet he that understands this, knows as much as is necessary to be known, as much as the Gospel requires to be known, concerning this duty.

It would but distract you to no purpose, to use more words; if you do but know what Christ has commanded, and do but resolve to do it to the best of your power, believing that God can and will bless His own ordinances, you know enough to have His blessing, and that is what the wisest will be well content with. I will only, therefore, give you one plain instance to make this easy to your understanding:

Naaman an Assyrian, being afflicted with a leprosy, was advised to go into the land of Israel, to a prophet of God, for a cure. He did so. The prophet only orders him to go to the next river, the river Jordan, and wash himself in it seven times. This displeased the man very much, thinking with himself, that if a little common water could heal him, there was no need of coming so far for it. Now, here was his ignorance and fault. He did not consider, that though the water of Jordan could not cure him, yet God's blessing upon the prophet's directions might do it. And when his servants prevailed with him to follow the prophet's orders, he found himself cured in a moment. 2 Kings 5.

Now, to apply this: Christ commands us to receive this Sacrament, and when we do so, to remember, that He died for the good of all mankind that would obey His commands. He bids us believe this, and that He will bless us if we do our best.

SERM. LXXVII.

Why now, what have we to do, but to consider what Christ has commanded, to resolve to do our parts, and to believe and trust His word and goodness, that a blessing will follow our doing so?

We may, indeed, do as Naaman did, raise objections, and doubt whether it is likely that the doing so common a thing can procure us such great benefits as we are promised we shall receive thereby; but then we should be much to blame, and should hinder our own happiness. It is not mere bread and wine, but bread and wine made the Body and Blood of Jesus Christ in effect and power, though not in substance, that can procure us the blessing we desire.

So that whoever knows thus much, knows enough to come worthily to the Sacrament, and shall be a worthy partaker of the most blessed Body and Blood of Christ, provided his heart be right, and that he will do his best according to his knowledge.

III. And this brings us to the third particular: *that as this duty is most easy to be understood, so it may be worthily and safely performed, and received, by the most unlearned Christian, to his great comfort and benefit.*

We have a very plain, and a very short direction, by which we are to fit ourselves for this Sacrament. We are to repent us truly of our sins past; we are to come to the Sacrament with a full purpose of leading a Christian life for the time to come; we are to rely upon God for pardon and grace for the sake of Christ, whose death we then remember; and we are to forgive, and to love, and to do good to others, since God is so good and so kind to us.

Whoever can but do these things, nay, whoever will but *do his best* to do them, will be a worthy partaker of the Lord's Supper, which is the greatest encouragement and comfort that the heart of man can desire. For God expects no more of any man, but that he make an honest use of that measure of grace and understanding which God has given him.

Let a man's understanding be never so mean, his faith weak, and his ability for the present small; yet, if he is but heartily convinced that he is a sinner, if he is sorry that he is so, and desires that God would pardon him, and re-

solves but to do what he can to please God, and to gain His favour, such a person is in a way of salvation, and may come, and ought to come, to the holy Sacrament, and will be a worthy communicant.

And the reason is this: whatever grace or saving knowledge, the best of us have, it is all God's gift. Those to whom God has given much, from them He will require much, and He will be well pleased with little from them to whom He has given little; only this He requires from all, that they should use the grace He gives.

For this is God's way of dealing with men: they that make use of His grace and favour shall have more, and they that neglect it shall be left to themselves.

Now, since faith and the grace of God are ordinarily wrought in our hearts by preaching the Word; I will lay the Word of God plainly before you, that you may see the necessity and the advantage of doing these things, which are required of them that come to the Lord's Supper. And may His good blessing make His own word effectual for the conversion of those that do not yet see their duty?

It may be, you do not find your heart sensible of the great evil and danger of sin, and therefore you cannot *truly repent of it*. But do but consider what it is to sin: that it is to break the laws of the God of heaven, who has declared, that He will call all men to an account, and give to every man according to his works; and they that have done evil and do not repent, shall perish, shall go into everlasting misery, where the worm dieth not, and the fire is not quenched.

Now, is this a condition that any man in his right mind can be easy in?

On the other side, do but consider what it is to repent: it is to confess that I am indeed a sinful creature, that I have broken the laws of God, but that for the future I will strive against sin, and endeavour to do what I believe God would have me to do, that He may forgive me according to His promise, that He may be gracious to me, and bless me here, and that I may be for ever happy in heaven.

Are not these good reasons why one should earnestly pray to God that He would give us grace to repent, and why we should strive to forsake every evil way?

SERM. LXXVII.

Now, this is the *first* thing required of those that come to the Lord's Supper.

The *second* is, that we purpose in our hearts to live like Christians. And sure any man who believes that this is the only way to be happy for ever, will be inclined to do so. There are difficulties, it is true, in a Christian life; but then God, who commands us to live well, can and will enable us to overcome them, if we earnestly desire His help, and do the best we can.

And in the next place, will it not be very natural for us to have a thankful remembrance of Christ's death, when we consider that it is for the sake of Christ's death that God will be merciful unto us, and forgive us our sins?

And lastly; shall we not very cheerfully forgive all that have injured us, when we are asking God to forgive our great offences against Him? Shall we expect a share of God's love, and afford none to our fellow-creatures? Shall God give *us* a share of the good things of this world, and shall not we give a part to those poor creatures to whom He has denied these blessings?

The meanest capacities must see that these things are fit and necessary to be done. And they that are most apt to fear must be satisfied that there is no danger of receiving unworthily, if a man does but mean well, and do his duty to the best of his power. Such a one may have his fears, but he cannot possibly be in danger, no more than a dutiful son can be in danger from a kind father, who sees him doing his best to please him.

It is required, indeed, that every body should come to the Sacrament with a quiet conscience; that is, he should be satisfied in his conscience that he is sorry for his offences against God and man; that he purposes to do his duty to both for the time to come, to the best of his power, as God shall enable him; and lastly, he is to be satisfied, that if he is sincere in this God will be just to *His* promise; He will pardon, and assist, and bless him.

IV. And therefore, in the last place, generally speaking, *whatever it is that hinders people from coming to the Sacrament, will hinder them from going to heaven.* I say, generally speaking, for there may be people under such invincible

scruples or melancholy as may hinder them from coming to the Sacrament, and yet such as God in mercy will pardon; for He knows the secrets of men's hearts. But these cases are few, and those many people who neglect the Lord's Supper, do it for such reasons as will shut them out of heaven if they do not repent and amend.

Such are these following: a downright carelessness, or an indifference about religion, and the great concern of their souls. Or, secondly, an uneasiness to look into the errors of their lives past. Or, thirdly, an unwillingness to reform for the time to come. Or, lastly, an imperfect resolution, that some time or other they will repent, and do what they ought, and so come to the Sacrament.

Whatever is pretended, these are for the most part the true reasons why people neglect to come to the holy Sacrament. And it is too plain that these are reasons which will keep a man out of heaven, as well as from the Lord's Supper.

I should not pretend to say that these are the true reasons of men's staying from the Sacrament, if their hearts were known; but that I know, by sad experience, that the heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked; and will deceive us by pretending that we have reasons for not doing our duty, when very often we have none, but an unwillingness to do what God has commanded.

But this will justify what I have said. If people really have scruples, and are concerned for their salvation, they will endeavour to have them removed some time. They have frequent notice, and are desired to do so, that they may receive with a quiet mind. And if they do not come to be satisfied, it is not any real scruple, but a real fault, a corrupt heart, which will keep them out of heaven. And therefore, I do testify against all such persons as shall wilfully neglect this ordinance, that if they do not apply themselves for satisfaction, they have truly no scruples; but either they are under the power of a sinful life, and are unwilling to repent, or they are careless of themselves and God's ordinances.

I shall only add a few words upon this particular, to shew how much to blame people are for making scruples where there really are none.

SERM. LXXVII.

One saith, I am not so well prepared as I ought, or as I could wish to be. Why now, learn from God's Word what you ought to do under such fears as these.

The passover was one of the Jewish sacraments, which they were to eat after having duly prepared themselves. Now we find, that "a multitude of people had not cleansed themselves, yet did they eat the passover otherwise than it was written: but Hezekiah prayed for them, saying, The good Lord pardon every one that prepareth his heart to seek God, the Lord God of his fathers, though he be not cleansed according to the purification of the sanctuary. And the Lord hearkened to Hezekiah, and healed the people." From whence it is plain, that if a man does but set his heart truly to seek God, God will pardon a great many imperfections besides.

2 Chron. 30. 18, &c.

But suppose a person has reason for staying some time from this duty; that reason ought not to hinder him a second time. Hear what God appointed to be done in a like case.

The people of Israel are strictly commanded [Numb. ix.] to keep the passover on the fourteenth of the first month; but if any person knew himself not prepared, according to the words of the law, to come then; he was not to fail to come the fourteenth of the second month, or else that soul was to be cut off. Here is a plain direction.

But, saith another, I do not find myself sufficiently humbled for my sins. But you know whether you desire to be so; if you do so in good earnest, you ought to go to the Sacrament; because humility, being God's gift, you are sure to find it in His own way.

But I am, say you, not sure that I can forsake my sins. You are, however, sure that you must leave them some time, or you are undone for ever. Something you can do towards it. You can pray to God to enable you; and let any man be assured of this, that he who against his inclinations forces himself to go to the Lord's Supper, purely because he finds himself unable to keep God's commandments, such a person is better prepared than he is aware of. "Come unto Me," saith Christ, "all that travail, and are heavy laden, and I will refresh you."

[Matt. 11. 28.]

Here is true faith to come to God, and to depend upon Him for help. For be assured that it is more acceptable to God to do what we can than to do nothing. This the Word of God has decided in that parable where the slothful servant is sent to a severe punishment, because he would not stir one foot to improve his talent, because he was afraid he should not please his lord.

But my heart has deceived me, and I find that, notwithstanding my former purposes, I have fallen into sin. And you desire to know what to do? You shall be judge yourself: a son promises his father never to disobey him; but afterwards he does. What is it that the father expects from this son? Why, that he should renew his promise, and endeavour to observe it better afterwards. Why now, God is our Father, and knows our infirmities, and pities us, and loves us, more than any man alive can love his son. And will not He forgive us, as often as we mean well?

This is our comfort in the midst of our imperfections, that God expects no more from us than He will enable us to do; but this He doth expect from all of us,—that we be sincere in what we profess, and that we go to Him for help.

By the sacrament of baptism, God is pleased to enter into covenant with us; we are made Christians, and are dedicated to God almost as soon as we are born. And that we may not lose the benefit of such an early dedication, the Church of God has provided, that as soon as we are capable of understanding our duty, we shall make good what was promised for us by solemnly taking it upon ourselves before the congregation.

Now, because it is possible for those who have thus engaged themselves to God's service to forget their vows; therefore has our Lord appointed *another Sacrament*, that of *the Lord's Supper*, in memory of His death; that in the conscientious use of this, men may satisfy the world and their own consciences that they continue to be members of Christ's Church, &c.

But that men may not dissemble with God and His Church, in coming to this Sacrament without full purposes of living like Christians, God has declared, that the danger is great of those who shall presume to receive unworthily;

SERM. LXXVII.

[Exhortation in Holy Communion office.]

that is, without considering before, what it is they are going about. "They eat and drink their own damnation, not considering the Lord's body; they kindle God's wrath against them; they provoke Him to plague them with divers diseases, and sundry kinds of death."

Here then is the case: *and it requires our most serious consideration.* If we do not receive the Sacrament of the Lord's Supper, we are no longer Christians, and in covenant with God. If we receive it unworthily, we are in danger of God's judgments. So that there is no way for a man to take (who cares what will become of himself) but to endeavour to be a worthy partaker of this holy Sacrament. To do this these following things are required of us:

First; a man must seriously consider, whether he does in truth desire to be saved? Whether he desires it so much as to take some pains to be saved?

Secondly; he must consider, that no man can be saved, who cannot resolve to leave his sins, and honestly endeavour to keep God's commandments: and,

Thirdly; because no man can be saved by his own merits, but only by the merits of Christ; therefore he is to consider, that it is necessary to depend entirely upon Christ for grace to do what is required of us, and to take the way of obtaining this grace which He has appointed.

Now, if I do indeed desire to be saved; if I can seriously resolve to be at any pains about it; if I can in good earnest purpose to part with my sins, which are offensive to God, and which will keep me out of heaven; and if I do purpose in my heart to lead a good life, according to that measure of knowledge and strength which God shall give me; then may I come worthily to the Lord's Table; there I may confidently expect that God will pardon all my former sins for the sake of Jesus Christ; there I may promise myself new supplies of grace and strength, to enable me to work out my salvation; and I may look upon that Sacrament as a sure pledge, that God will make all His promises good to me, of grace here, and of heaven hereafter.

So that you see there is no great learning required to make a person a worthy communicant. The great matter lieth in being truly convinced of the danger of continuing

in sin, and in possessing our souls with a great desire of pleasing God, and going to heaven.

Nor is it necessary that a man should have a great deal of time to spare to fit himself for this duty; for he that is at his labour, and getting bread for his family, if his heart be right, and if he depends upon God for a blessing, is doing a work in its kind as acceptable to God as he that is at his prayers.

And is this all that is required? You will be satisfied it is so, when I have put you in mind of the direction which the holy Scriptures (which are always our best guide) afford us concerning this matter.

St. Paul and Silas are cast into prison: the keeper of the prison, being terrified by an earthquake, begins immediately to think of a world to come, and asks the Apostles, "Sirs, what shall I do to be saved?" The Apostles tell him what he must do; that he must believe and repent of his sins, that he *might* be saved. He professes his belief in Christ, and immediately he was baptized and all his house. Acts 16.

Now, here is a man and his family, and such a family as are not commonly the most orderly; here they are admitted to one sacrament, upon a good purpose of living like Christians.

And why may we not come to the other Sacrament as worthily, if we have but the same good dispositions as this man had? No doubt of it, we may.

And the conclusion of all this will be, that the best preparation for the Sacrament of the Lord's Supper, is an honest purpose of heart of serving God to the best of one's power.

But then the case is not the same with those who have often renewed their vows, and often broke them. Something more is required of them; they ought to consider seriously what it is to break their vows; that the guilt and the danger is exceeding great; that therefore they ought to be very careful for the time to come not to fall into such relapses. With these purposes they ought to come again to the holy Communion; and God, who is very merciful to those who sincerely purpose to lead a new life, will graciously pardon them.

And now you see what a blessing it is, that we have

SERM. LXXVII.

always a cure ready at hand for the sorrow that arises in a heart sensible of its corruptions, and thoughtful of what may come hereafter.

And God Almighty grant, that none of us here present may ever despise the means of grace so mercifully provided for us.

And the good Lord fit us all, by His sacraments here, for heaven hereafter, for Jesus Christ's sake.

To Whom, with the Father, &c.

SERMON LXXVIII.

A CHARITY SERMON.

GOD'S GOODNESS TO MEN THE FOUNDATION OF THE LOVE THEY OUGHT TO HAVE FOR HIM, AND FOR HIS SAKE, FOR THEIR NEIGHBOUR.

LUKE vii. 41—48.

There was a certain creditor which had two debtors: the one owed five hundred pence, and the other fifty: and when they had nothing to pay, he frankly forgave them both. Tell me, therefore, which of them will love him most? Simon answered and said, I suppose that he to whom he forgave most. And he said unto him, thou hast rightly judged. And He turned to the woman, and said unto Simon, seest thou this woman? I entered into thine house, thou gavest Me no water for My feet: but she hath washed My feet with tears, and wiped them with the hairs of her head. Thou gavest Me no kiss: but this woman, since the time I came in, hath not ceased to kiss My feet. Mine head with oil thou didst not anoint: but this woman hath anointed My feet with ointment. Wherefore I say unto thee, HER SINS, WHICH ARE MANY, ARE FORGIVEN; *for she loved much: but to whom little is forgiven, the same loveth little. And He said unto her,* THY SINS ARE FORGIVEN.

To have this sentence from the mouth of the Son of God, and Judge of the world, what a surprising comfort must it needs have been to this poor penitent! And yet this is our happiness, and we do not consider it; this is the very case of every penitent sinner, who goes to God with a heart full of love and gratitude for the mercies offered us in Jesus Christ. The very same sentence, THY SINS ARE FORGIVEN THEE, as certainly passes in heaven upon every penitent so disposed,

SERM. LXXVIII.

as if we heard it from our Saviour's own mouth. The only question is, *Who is it that may expect so happy a sentence?*

In order to give a more satisfactory answer to this question, we shall consider the *occasion* of these words, and the *reasons* upon which this sentence was founded.

The OCCASION was *this:* Our Lord was invited to dine with a certain Pharisee. While they were at meat, a woman of that neighbourhood, who was (not only in the opinion of that Pharisee, but in her own judgment) *a great sinner,* came to Christ, and in a most affecting manner, instead of washing His feet with water (a common civility in those hot countries), she did it with her tears, discovering by *this,* and her other behaviour, a great respect, and an unusual affection. The Pharisee, who would have been very uneasy to have had a person of this woman's character so near himself, is surprised to see our Lord so little concerned at it; and saith within himself, if this man were a prophet, as it is said He is, (that is, if He is *the great Prophet,* whom God by Moses promised to send to His people,) He would have known who and what manner of woman this is that toucheth Him, *for she is a sinner,* and consequently not fit to come so near an holy man.

Now our Lord, to convince the Pharisee that *He was* THAT VERY PROPHET, lets him know, that He not only knew what manner of woman *she* was, but even what passed in *his* breast, WHICH NONE BUT GOD COULD KNOW. And to make him in a more lively manner sensible of *a great mistake he laboured under,* in a very friendly and affecting way, He repeats this parable, and leaves it *to him* to make the inference. "There was," saith He, "a certain creditor which had two debtors; the one owed him a very great sum, ten times as much as the other: and when they had nothing to pay, he frankly forgave them both. Which of them will love him most?" The Pharisee answered, 'I suppose he to whom he forgave most.' "In this," saith our Lord, "thou hast rightly judged."

And now hear this woman's case. She was indeed a *great sinner;* she became a sincere penitent; and one, who she knows has power to forgive sins, has pardoned her. This makes her express her *concern,* her *love,* and *gratitude,* after

so uncommon a manner. For the language of all these tears, and this humility, is plainly this. My sins were so many and great, that I had been for ever undone, had not God touched my heart with a sense of the danger I was in. By His grace, I see the *evil*, the *folly*, and the *ingratitude*, of sinning against so good and gracious a God and Father. By His Son, who sees the sincerity of my heart and repentance, I am sure that all my past offences are forgiven; and my heart is full of love and gratitude for so mighty a favour, which I cannot but express by all ways which I can hope will be acceptable to God.

This was the OCCASION of *this parable.*

And the REASON on which our Lord founded *this sentence*, "Thy sins are forgiven thee," was *this:* she shewed that she was a *true penitent*, "by works meet for repentance;" such works as were most proper on that occasion *to shew her sincerity*. Our Lord knew the secrets of her heart, and so could pass a *positive sentence;* and yet He did not think fit to do so, until, by her behaviour, she did that which might convince every charitable observer that she was seriously resolved to lead a new life.

And this, no doubt, was to direct the ministers of His kingdom how to behave themselves upon the like occasion. He purposed to invest His ministers, to the end of the world, with a power of *binding* and *loosing*, of speaking peace to dejected penitents, and of giving them such assurances of pardon and forgiveness, as their repentance might warrant them to do. He, in His infinite wisdom, foresaw what *ill use proud man might make of this power;* He would therefore, *by this instance*, teach His faithful stewards not rashly to pronounce any sentence in His name, but to wait till God, by the powerful working of His grace, should so effectually convince the sinner of the error of his ways, that he should give proofs of his repentance *by works answerable to amendment of life*. Then His ministers need not fear passing a righteous sentence, nor the sincere penitent doubt of the truth and comfortable effects of all.

For this is a *certain truth*, that the grace of God evermore accompanies the ministrations of His servants, and attends His own ordinances, if there be nothing to hinder it on the

SERM. LXXVIII.

part of those that expect benefit by the use of them. And therefore it is no small comfort and advantage (how much soever it has been slighted) for such as are under afflictions of mind, to have the judgment of God's minister upon their case, and the benefit of absolution; for though none but God, *the searcher of hearts*, can pronounce this sentence, *Thy sins are forgiven thee;* yet His ministers, who have carefully studied His holy Word, can assure sinners of God's pardon, and can pronounce a righteous sentence upon what appears; which sentence a penitent may depend on to his great peace and comfort, provided he knows he has been sincere in discovering his malady, and in following the advice of his spiritual guide.

It is true, there are people who have abused this power, to the ruin, it is to be feared, of an infinite number of souls. When men rashly pronounce a sentence of pardon, upon a bare confession of sins, and upon a promise of better obedience, without waiting to see whether such promises are like to be followed by works meet for repentance, without which the pardon is rash, and the sinner deluded: this is indeed an usurped authority; but ought not to depreciate those true powers with which Christ has invested His faithful ministers, of pronouncing the sentence of truth on earth, which He will ratify in heaven.

But to return to the parable, upon which we may make these following observations:

First; that all mankind are in the condition and circumstances of one of these two debtors. We have all of us offended God more or less, and are all accountable to His justice.

Secondly; that the best of men have nothing wherewith to satisfy for their offences, or to appease the justice of God: *we have nothing to pay.*

Thirdly; notwithstanding this, God is so gracious and merciful, as to forgive all such as are sensible of their own inability, sorry for the debt they owe, apply to Him for His compassion and forgiveness, and will strive to regain and to deserve His favour. *He frankly forgave them both.*

Lastly; we have here a rule given us, whereby we may judge of the sincerity of our faith and repentance, and con-

sequently of the certainty that our sins are forgiven. For if we love God, so as to do what will please Him, then are we sure our sins will never rise up in judgment against us. *Her sins, which are many, are forgiven her, for she loved much.*

I. Let us first consider, *that we are all in the condition of one of these two debtors;* that is, we have all offended God, and, without His favour and goodness, we are all undone. Hear what the holy Scripture teacheth us upon this head: "We are by nature the children of wrath; a generation of evil doers;—we love darkness rather than light, because our deeds are evil, and will not bear the light; and the imaginations of our hearts are evil continually;" that is, this is the way they naturally bend. [Eph. 2. 3; Is. 1. 4; John 3. 19, 20; Gen. 6. 5.]

And though we should hope that God may overlook *this untowardness of our nature,* entailed upon us by the sin of our first parents, yet what a debt do we all owe for the *many, very many* actual transgressions of our lives? the effects either of *base principles,* or a *loose education,* or *evil custom;* or from *a love of the world,* or *sensual pleasures;* by which God has been dishonoured, His laws despised, His infinite love abused, and His power and justice, as it were, *defied.*

And though we should any of us escape (as many, no doubt, have) those sins which lay waste the conscience, and are by all acknowledged to be damnable in their nature; yet we are still accountable, the very best of us, for the many opportunities we have lost of doing good, of promoting the glory of God by our *good lives* and *good works.*

For these two things are certainly true: that God has ordained good works, in which we should walk, and that the *unprofitable* as well as the *wicked* servant, will be cast into *outer darkness.*

So that we are accountable to God, not only for the *sins* we have committed, but for the *duties* we have omitted. In short, we are all DEBTORS TO GOD, not only for the *pardon of our sins,* but also *for the means of grace,* and *for the hope of glory.*

It is by the favour of God, and through the means of grace which He has appointed, that we know our duty; that we are enabled to perform it acceptably, if it is not our

SERM. LXXVIII.

own fault; that, when through our own default we have broken the laws of God, we are not left without hopes of mercy and pardon, but that God will accept of our repentance *if it be sincere,* receive us into favour again, and treat us as if we had never offended Him; and, what is the most astonishing instance of His goodness, He has given us an assurance of eternal life and happiness after death, if we will but suffer ourselves to be governed by Him during this short life of trial, which is designed to fit us for heaven. This is the mighty debt we owe.

II. Let us now see, *what we have, how we are able, to discharge it?* Why truly, as we are in the condition of these debtors with respect to our *obligations,* so are we with regard to our *ability*—WE HAVE NOTHING TO PAY.

This is a circumstance which ought to affect us very sensibly. That God, knowing our inability, and that the very best of men have no merits, nothing of their own, whereby to satisfy for the debt they owe, does not expect from us what we have not to give,—*a full satisfaction for the blessings we have received.* He knew our poverty, and therefore He Himself found out a way to satisfy His own justice and demands.

Let us consider this circumstance of the love of God towards us more particularly.

We have many ways offended God, we have no way of making Him amends. He, whom we have provoked to punish us, is the first who proposeth a reconciliation. He does not only offer to *forgive us* upon the most reasonable terms, upon terms which He Himself will enable us to perform; but He has given us His faithful word and promise, that, if we will be persuaded and governed by Him, He will make us happy beyond our greatest expectations. He sent His only Son into the world, to assure us of this; who would never have left the joys of heaven, nor taken the nature of man with all its miseries upon Him, had not He known for certain, that if men were left to themselves, and to their own wild inventions, they would be most miserable both in this life and the next.

For what strange ways did they, with all their boasted reason, take to satisfy the justice of God, and to appease His

anger, whom they had provoked by their sins? They sacrificed the best of their substance, they often sacrificed their very children, to make their consciences easy under the burden of their offences; and yet, after all, their minds were not satisfied.

The merciful God saw and pitied this mournful condition of His helpless creatures, and *knowing their inability to help themselves,* He therefore Himself found out a way for their redemption; He sent His only Son with terms of pardon, freely forgiving all such as with hearty repentance and true faith turn unto Him, and accept of the terms of their deliverance.

III. The great creditor of the world forgives us frankly: forgives, not only those who have committed the fewest offences, but even those whose sins are great and innumerable; not only those offences which are the effect of our infirmities, but even *wilful presumptuous sins,* for which, *under the Law of Moses, there was no atonement.* In a word; He is ready to forgive us those sins, which, if we are in our right mind, we can never be easy, until we have some reasonable hopes, and even assurance, that they will be forgiven.

But can we have any such assurance? Yes, most certainly; as much as this happy penitent had, that *her* sins were forgiven her. And this brings us to the next inference from the text:

IV. *That we have here a rule, a test, given us, by which we may be able to judge of the sincerity of our faith and repentance;* that is, of our religion, and consequently of our salvation.

For if indeed we *love God;* that is, if we endeavour to keep His commandments (for that is the only way of expressing our love of God, as He is our Lord and Lawgiver), then may we be well assured, that we believe in Him as we ought to do, and that we have truly repented of those sins, which, by the grace of God, we resolve never to repeat again. And happy it is for us poor mortals, that the terms of our salvation are so easy to be understood.

Christians might be confounded with the nice disputes concerning *Faith* and *Repentance;* but there is no manner

SERM. LXXVIII.

of difficulty in knowing whether we resolve to live up to that measure of knowledge and power which God has given us; and seriously purpose to make use of *the means*, which in His Word He hath ordained for our salvation.

For though God has freely, upon our repentance, forgiven us what is past; so that, unless it is our own fault, our sins shall never rise up in judgment against us; yet still this mighty favour is vouchsafed on *conditions:* on condition, that we become the faithful servants of that God who has been so good to us; on condition, that whenever hereafter we shall be so unhappy as to fall into any sin, through *ignorance, surprise,* or any other temptation, we do immediately return to God, implore His pardon, make new resolutions of obedience, and be more careful to keep them for the time to come; on condition, that we forgive others as we hope for forgiveness from God; on condition, that we neglect none of those helps which God has afforded us, that we read or hear His Word, that we renew our vows and our covenant with Him, that we pray to Him daily for what we want, and especially for grace to know and to do our duty, that we will thankfully acknowledge His favours, and with submission receive what His providence shall order for us.

These are the *conditions* on which we are forgiven; and if we perform these, we may be sure God has forgiven us.

Well, blessed God! if this parable doth truly set forth Thy mercy and goodness to sinful men, as we are sure it does (for they are the words of Thy beloved Son), how then may we all take heart and comfort? It is but confessing our *inability,* our *poverty,* our *unworthiness,* and an earnest desire of being forgiven, and resolving to live like men that have received such mighty favours, and bringing forth fruits meet for repentance, and the debt is cleared.

And can *I* read, or can *you* hear these words, and not be exceedingly moved with their importance? Can a sinner hear of being frankly forgiven, and his heart not leap for joy? Can the greatest of sinners hear that there is the same mercy even for them, and not be surprised with love and gratitude?

In one word; God would have the love of all His creatures. To gain our love, He has used these methods. He

has set before us the evil and the danger of sin; He has offered us a full and free pardon of all our offences, on conditions most reasonable; He has proposed to us very great happiness, and made it our own fault, if we come short of it. After this, He expects that we should love Him in some measure proportionable to the blessings we have received, and do expect from Him. For so, you see, did this worthy penitent in the history before us; so do all people who are truly sensible of the obligations they lie under; and so shall we too, if we understand, and be true to, our own everlasting interest.

We shall shew that we love God (*for love will shew itself*), by always doing that which He has commanded, that which we believe will please Him. We shall always live in the fear of God, that we may not consent to known iniquity. "I have set God always before me, therefore I shall not fall," saith the Psalmist. If at any time we fall into sin (for there is no man that sinneth not), we shall remember the practice of the same holy man: "I made haste, and delayed not to keep Thy commandments." We shall be very careful to call upon God by diligent prayer, by which we shall learn to love and depend on Him.

[Ps. 16. 8.]

[Ps. 119. 60.]

Being thus disposed, His Holy Spirit will *direct* us in the way we should go, *assist* us when we want help, *awaken* us when we grow careless, *correct* us when we forget our duty, and will never forsake us until He bring us safe to heaven, when all danger will be over, and we shall be for ever happy.

In the mean time, and in prospect of *this happiness*, it behoves every person here present, who is engaged in a sinful course of life, to bethink himself what he is like to suffer, by delaying his repentance; that leaving his folly, and his sinful choices, he may learn by the example of *this penitent, whose sins were many,* not to despair of mercy, but to make all the haste he can to break his bonds, to regain the favour of God; that he may taste and see how gracious the Lord is, how ready to forgive, how bountiful to reward, His sincere servants.

And happy surely are all such whom God vouchsafes thus powerfully to call from a state of sin and death; happy are

SERM. LXXVIII.

all those sinners, who are so wise as to obey His gracious call, and live to bring forth fruits meet for repentance!

But the ways of sin are extremely dangerous; and the return to righteousness, *difficult, irksome, hazardous,* and *uncertain.*

More happy therefore by far, and more safe, are the circumstances of those, who, from their very youth, are taught to know and to fear the Lord their Maker. And commendable are the endeavours, and glorious will be the reward, of all such as any way contribute to so good a work!

It is true, all parents stand charged, and are answerable for the good education of their children; all masters are in some measure accountable for the faith and manners of their servants; and every Clergyman, who has a cure of souls, is obliged to extend his care to, and feed the lambs, as well as the sheep of Christ.

But, alas! when we consider, what an infinite number of parents there are, who know not their own duty; what an infinite number of children there are, who have no parents, or none able, or not willing, to take care of them; how many masters, who are no further concerned for their servants, than to have their labour and their time at their command; and lastly, how many parishes there are, so large, and unproportionable to the endeavours of the most careful pastor; we may easily guess at the infinite number of souls, which must go to the grave *untaught;* who know little or nothing of their errand into the world, or of the account they must give of their time spent in it, unless by some kind providence of God they are otherways instructed.

And blessed be God, who has put it into the hearts of so many Christians of this, and other Churches and nations, to set up *Charity Schools,* in order to enlarge the kingdom of Christ, and (by the good blessing of God) to weaken that of Satan.

And indeed, had not *these,* and some other *worthy societies,* stood in the gap, to stop the growth of *ignorance,* of *profaneness,* and *infidelity,* and to provide proper remedies either to cure or to prevent them, most dismal, in all probability, must have been the face of religion in a few years; perhaps so deformed, and provoking, as to force God to remove *our*

candlestick, as He has done many others; and to deprive us of *that light*, which we had made so ill use of.

For this is plainly the state of religion, and of its professors, at this day. Too many of those, whom God has distinguished by honours and great estates, are extremely corrupted by His favours; they forget the God that raised them, the vows that are upon them; they despise the means of grace and salvation which He offers them, and, by a wickedness worse than pagan, they would have all others as much infidels as themselves.

On the other hand, there are a mighty number of people, whose circumstances are low and mean, whose understandings are slow, and whose opportunities of learning their duty are very few; if any of these ignorant people better their condition in the world, prosperity is but a snare to them; and if they continue poor, they often only live to people the world with a posterity as ignorant as themselves.

In short; we often lament the darkness in which the heathen world is involved, and pity the condition of those who know not the true God. In the mean while, we do not consider that even amongst ourselves, in the very throng of Christians, there are a great many who are in a manner utter strangers to the design of the Gospel, and entirely uninfluenced either by its *promises* or *threatenings*.

And much greater would have been the number of these unhappy souls, had not so many good people contributed their helping hand to rescue them out of this state of want and ignorance.

For this good work I am now an advocate; a work which *will* prosper as long as God has mercies in store for this nation, notwithstanding the evil report which Satan and his instruments have endeavoured to fix upon it. We need make no apology for calling those the instruments of Satan who have set themselves to *speak* and *write against the Charity Schools;* because these very people speak contemptibly of the *Word and Ordinances of God,* confound men's notions of *good* and *evil,* make these the fancies of men, rather than the consequence of eternal reason and truth.

But what is the reason of all this zeal against *Charity Schools,* and those that endeavour to support them? Why,

SERM. LXXVIII.

they are afraid, that if the children of the poor are to have an orderly and Christian education, they shall want *beasts of burden* (for such, by their way of arguing, they esteem them) *to do their drudgery*; that is, provided the rich can have the bodies and labour of the poor at their service, it is no matter what becomes of their souls. They do not consider, that the Christian instruction and education that children have in these schools is the likeliest method of making them *better men* and *better servants*, obedient to their masters, true and just in their dealings, and to do their duty in that state of life unto which the providence of God shall call them. Neither have, I believe, these hard-hearted people considered (and yet it may very probably come to pass), that, by the just judgment of God upon them for their infidelity and profaneness, their own posterity in the next generation may come to want that help and instruction which they now envy these poor children.

But I shall say no more on this head. The work will commend itself; and if any unforeseen evil consequences creep into it unawares, when they are observed, they will no doubt be guarded against, without laying aside a design and work so well calculated for promoting the glory of God, and the good of souls. And as such I recommend it to you, as the likeliest way to avert the judgments and draw down the blessings of God upon this Church and nation.

For the great design of this charity is the very same with that of the Gospel, "To turn men from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan unto God." And that, as in our daily devotions we pray *that the kingdom of God may come*, we may, by our hearty endeavours, and cheerful contributions, strive to advance it in good earnest.

[Acts 26. 18.]

In order to *this*, we should endeavour to lay aside all selfish principles, which are apt to make us refer all things to ourselves. Let us rather look upon these children in the same light that God Himself sees them; namely, as the work of His hands, as part of His love and care, as persons redeemed by the blood of His dear Son, as members of Christ's visible Church, as part of that body, which must suffer if any of its members suffer, as creatures *capable* of eternal happiness, and yet *liable* to eternal misery. And then we shall

think ourselves bound, by all the obligations of interest, of duty, of compassion, and of gratitude, to contribute towards giving them a Christian education, towards supporting a charity whereby the bodies and the souls of the poor are regarded, by which parents receive both relief and comfort in the care that is taken of their children; and an infinite number of souls have been and are like to be rescued from the consequences of poverty and ignorance, which are, very often, vice and misery in this world, and eternal misery in the world to come.

And before I conclude, let me just put you in mind of the text, and the inferences made from it; namely, that as our love of God will always rise in proportion to the sense we have of the debt He has forgiven us, or that we expect He will forgive us; so, wherever there is a sincere love of God, it will evermore appear, according to our power, in acts of mercy and charity.

To conclude the whole: it is by the favour of God that so many of us here present do want nothing that is needful either for our souls or for our bodies. Whatever we have cometh of God, and whatever we give, of His own do we give Him. And happy will it be for us, if what any of us give upon these occasions may but atone for our many vain expenses.

Happy would it be for us, if the frequent occasions of this kind, which we meet with, may make us more careful to husband the talents wherewith we are intrusted, that we may always be ready to offer some testimony of our love and gratitude to God, who has been so good and kind to us. That if it should ever be His pleasure to change our circumstances into a lower condition, we may have this comfort however, which will be no small one, that so much as we have given to God, and for His sake, to these good purposes, so much treasure we have laid up in heaven. For which place, may our merciful God prepare us all, by disposing us all to acts of mercy and piety, and in His good time bring us thither for the Lord Jesus' sake.

To Whom, with the Father and the Holy Ghost, be all honour and glory, now and for ever. Amen.

SERMON LXXIX.

A CHARITY SERMON, PREACHED AT ST. PETER'S, CORNHILL, SEPT. 28, 1711.

THE ADVANTAGES ARISING FROM THE CHRISTIAN EDUCATION OF POOR CHILDREN, AND ESPECIALLY OF POOR GIRLS.

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2 Tim. i. 4, 5.

. . . . *That I may be filled with joy, when I call to remembrance the unfeigned faith that is in thee, which dwelt first in thy grandmother Lois, and thy mother Eunice: and I am persuaded that in thee also.*

I have made choice of these words of St. Paul, as the most proper I can think of, to recommend a *charity* which seems to be chosen with so much judgment and foresight, that it only wants to be set in a *true light,* to have it approved and encouraged by all pious and well-disposed persons.

The *charity* is that of *educating* a considerable number of *poor children,* destitute of means to support, and of friends to take care of them.

The *argument* I would make use of to recommend this charity, is that which very much affected the Apostle, *and filled his heart with joy,*—to see true religion and piety continued in a family for so many generations.

And that which is very observable, and which should encourage us to take the same care in the education of girls as of boys, or perhaps a greater, is this: that the faith and piety here commended and gloried in were continued and propagated in the family by the women *chiefly.* That *unfeigned faith,* and that zeal for the glory of God, which was found in Timothy, and which qualified *him* for a bishop, or overseer, in the Church of God, was derived to *him* from his *mother* and *grandmother,* whose instruction and examples *he* followed; and so became an instrument of great good to the world.

This, without more words, will justify those who have taken

upon themselves the *trouble* and *management*, and in some measure the charge, of *this charity*.

But that they may not be disappointed in the assistances and encouragements which they may justly expect from others; it will be proper to lay before you, *in one short view*, what effects *they* and *you* may very reasonably hope for, from this work so well begun and intended. And *this* I shall endeavour to do, by laying before you, and explaining these following particulars:

First; that all thoughtful people will have reason to rejoice when TRUE RELIGION, *the unfeigned faith here spoken of*, is propagated in the world.

Secondly; that the best foundation of true religion is that which is laid in the sober education of youth. And,

Thirdly; because this foundation is designed for the good of both sexes, and that you may see the advantage of giving girls a Christian education, that mothers are, generally speaking, the best instruments of such education, and are more capable than men of advancing this end.

That, therefore, the taking a particular care of girls, and educating them in true religion, will be attended with the greatest advantages; and consequently, the zeal and charity of such as promote this good work is very commendable in the sight of God and man.

I. To begin with the first of these considerations: *that all thoughtful people will have reason to rejoice, when true religion, or an unfeigned faith, is propagated in the world.*

They that have the *public* most at heart find by experience, that people of *false* or of *no* principles do make but very indifferent members of the commonwealth. If they come to have authority, *as that sometimes happens*, they have nothing to restrain them from making their own will their law, and their private interest their *aim*, in all they do. If they are in a lower condition, there is no wickedness they are not ready to run into, having no knowledge nor fear of God to keep them within bounds. What must be the condition of a nation, where such as these make the greatest number? It is not the wisdom of the magistrate, nor the multitude of penal laws, nor a severity in putting them in execution, *can* secure the peace and happiness of such a state.

SERM. LXXIX.

It is much otherwise where people have been instructed in the true faith and fear of God, let their lot in the world be what it will.

Such as know that they are accountable to God for the abuse of the authority which He has given them will be afraid to oppress, though it be in the *power* of their hand to do so.

Such as have been bred up in principles of Christian obedience will be afraid to *resist*, lest they should receive to themselves damnation, let men put never so favourable a sense upon those words.

And lastly, let people be never so poor, if they have had a Christian education, you shall see them orderly in their families, content with their condition, not desiring to better it by unjust ways, but living in hopes of better days *here*, or in full assurance that an amends *will certainly* be made them in the *next* world for what they want in *this;* that in the mean time it is not worth their while to be factious and discontented, and uneasy to those whom God has set over them.

These are some of the many benefits the *public* will have by people's being bred up in the principles of true religion.

But they that have the *honour of God* most at heart will have more reason still to rejoice, when they shall see *a sincere faith and piety* propagated in the world.

It is part of our daily prayers, *that the kingdoms of the world may become the kingdom of our Lord Jesus Christ.* And shall we not endeavour, and shall we not be pleased, in "turning men from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan unto God?" Otherwise it is to no purpose, nor any just expression of our piety, to lament the wickedness of the world, and the daily dishonour done to God and religion. It was an *unwary* reproach of the Scribes and Pharisees, "These people that know not the law are cursed." Pray, whose fault was it, that they *knew not* the law? Was the law so very hard to be understood; or was it not the fault of those, who would not condescend to speak to the capacities of the meaner people, who would not consider their circumstances, and provide suitably for their instruction?

[Acts 26. 18.]

[John 7. 49.]

If we see God dishonoured by the wretched and wicked

lives of too many; if we see people careless of their souls, and unconcerned for what may come hereafter; we have too good reason to conclude, that these people never had a distinct knowledge of their duty, of their dependence upon God, and of their being accountable to Him.

If religion *will not*, let the regard we have to ourselves and families prevail with us to set forward this good work.

It is not generally taken notice of, the mischief that befalls us, by being in the neighbourhood of vice and impiety. Our children are more or less infected by evil examples; our servants are perpetually in danger of being corrupted; our charge in maintaining useless hands daily increases; and, which is not to be omitted, we are, or ought to be, under apprehensions of the judgments of God for the growing vices of the age, if we are not concerned to root them out.

In short; it is as true in ecclesiastical and civil bodies, as it is in the natural: *If one member suffer, all the members suffer with it.* [1 Cor. 12. 26.] There cannot be a great many wicked and loose people amongst us, but every body must feel an inconvenience more or less; and it is consequently the duty of every body to put to their helping hand, towards mending the principles and the manners of men of corrupt lives.

II. Now, that the best way of doing this will be, *to take care of the growing age, to educate as many of the younger sort as we can, in sound principles and civil behaviour,* is what we are to consider in the second place.

That which is called *education,* amongst the better sort, is *too often* no more than a method of bringing their children acquainted with the world, that on the one hand *they may not be singular,* and on the other, *that they may not be imposed on.*

How far this has contributed *towards bettering the world,* may be seen in the lives of such as have been thus educated; who, for want of being *restrained* in their youth, for want of being rightly informed, and made truly sensible of their duty, for want of examples of soberness and piety in those about them; and lastly, for want of being brought up under a sense of their *dependence* upon God, of their *inability* to please Him without His assistance, or of obtaining *that assistance,* without using the means of grace which He has appointed; for want of *this,* for the most part, when they come to be masters

SERM. LXXIX.

of themselves, they run into ways entirely contrary to the *precepts* and to the *design* of the Gospel. Until *this*, therefore, can be mended, we must expect no great reformation, nor so many examples of industry and piety, *from that side*, as might be wished.

Perhaps, the best method of convincing men of the fault of such education, is what we are of late fallen upon. For if poor children, destitute of *help*, *friends*, and *estates*, brought up in the knowledge and fear of God, with a moderate share of learning; if very many of these shall become better men in their generations, more exemplary in their lives, more just in their dealings, more diligent in their callings, and more useful to the world than those of greater fortunes; people will at last (it may be hoped) open their eyes, and see, *that the fear of the Lord is wisdom, and to depart from iniquity is understanding.* [Job 28. 28.]

And that we have good reason to believe that these will be the consequences of the methods taken to instruct poor children, even the short experience we have had may convince us. Their *parents* and *friends* find them more dutiful and tractable; their masters more diligent and faithful; and the public hereafter will find them more peaceable, than would have been expected from an undisciplined generation. For they are taken care of betimes, before *sin* and *hell* have got the dominion over them. By this means, religion and piety will become habitual to them; and they will be able, and with less reluctancy, to embrace and follow what their growing reason approves.

Those that have made the experiment know very well, how hard it is to free one's-self from the habits of vice contracted in our younger days; when the inclinations have been gratified, and the appetites let loose upon every thing that is desirable. It is not reason *then*, that will silence their cravings; it is not the being convinced that we are in the *wrong*, and in *danger*, that will enable us to take up, and change our course: we must *strive*, *deny* ourselves, *pray* for grace, and *resist* temptations; which people, unacquainted with these duties, are very hardly brought to do.

Happy are they, it is true, (*and God increase their number!*) who, from having been great sinners, become sincere

penitents. But the ways of sin are extremely deceitful and dangerous; and the return to righteousness, too *rare*, too *difficult*, too *irksome*, and *hazardous*, to be trusted to.

More happy therefore by far, and more safe, is the condition of those, who from their very youth are taught to *know*, and *fear*, and *serve*, the Lord their Maker. And commendable are the endeavours, and great will be the reward, of such as shall promote so worthy a design.

III. *How this design may best be promoted*, is what we *now* come to consider:—

We have already said, and we now come to prove it, *that mothers are generally the best instruments of such education, and are more capable than men of advancing this end;* that therefore this charity, which is employed in the Christian education of girls, will, of all others, have the best and most lasting effects.

That mothers, where they themselves have been well instructed, are *more capable than men*, of teaching their children, will appear from these considerations:

First; *from their circumstances and condition of life.* They are more within doors, have often more time to spare, are best acquainted with their children's temper, and always have them in their eye.

Secondly; *they have an advantage from their own make and temper.* They are generally more *apprehensive of danger*, and of what may come hereafter, *than men are.* This makes them more concerned for their children's everlasting welfare, and solicitous to teach them what they know themselves. Then they are of *a milder disposition*, can bear with their children's infirmities, and correct them with a tenderness which even recommends a necessary severity. By this means their children come to love them, and to be fond of their instruction, and to imitate their example.

Besides all this, they are more *patient of this kind of labour* than men are. It is not the child's dulness, nor the necessity of often repeating the same things, which will weary or discourage the pious mother.

And, *which is not to be omitted*, she has an opportunity of seeing whether her instructions are apprehended and followed, of *destroying vices* while they are in the bud, of en-

SERM. LXXIX.

couraging every commendable word and action in its proper season.

In one word; the mothers have an opportunity, both by their instruction and example, of fixing such lasting impressions upon their children's minds, as, by the blessing of God upon their endeavours, neither the iniquity of the age, nor the enemy of mankind, shall ever be able to blot out.

If these reasons weigh not with us, we have *matter of fact* to confirm all this. At this day, the children of Jews are always under the mother's care and instruction, *if living*, till they come to a certain age; during which time, they are taught to read the law, and so well instructed in its worth, and aim, and meaning, that they are very hardly, if ever, brought over to Christianity, either by the temporal or spiritual advantages which attend it.

One of the deputies at the Synod of Dort informed *that assembly*, that in his country (which I think was Pomerania), there was scarce a person, how poor and mean soever his condition was, but could read, and give a tolerable account of his faith. This, he said, was owing chiefly to the great care that had been taken to instruct the women, who, when they came to be mothers, scarce ever failed to instruct their children.

And indeed, so far it is true amongst us. We have few mothers, who can read, but *are very* earnest to teach their children. But it is not generally so with the men; they are more abroad, less thoughtful of their children's spiritual concerns, impatient of such kind of labour, and too often either put that trouble off to others, or leave it altogether undone. By which means we come to have, *in many families*, a succession of such *ignorant, impious* wretches, as are a scandal not only to Christianity but to all civil societies.

And if any body will be at the pains of looking into the families of those that come to untimely ends, they will generally find them the offspring of an ungracious family, in which you may trace up two or three generations of *untaught, idle, vicious* people.

On the other hand, we have an example in the text, and (God be praised!) we do not want examples amongst ourselves, of *virtue* and *piety*, and the *fear* and *blessing* of God,

continued in families for many generations, by the religious care and concern of parents that have had a Christian education; who, however they may excuse themselves from some other labours which attend the bringing up of their children, if they neglect *this*, they are *inexcusable*. Neither the *tenderness* of their constitution, nor the *care* of their families, much less the *pleasures* of the world; neither their *quality* on one hand, nor their *poverty* on the other, will ever free them from the *guilt*, and *infamy*, and *curse*, which will attend those who shall suffer their children to grow up, without *principles*, and without *morality*.

I will only mention one other advantage which this way of instruction and education will have towards bettering private families, and consequently the world:

That the *truth*, and great *design*, of the Christian religion has been too much lost in the *disputes* on one hand, and in the *intricate way of teaching* them on the other, is too plain to be questioned. Now, by *this way*, the providence of God seems to provide against the growing evil. They who are educated by *these charities* are taught *all* the necessary *principles* and *duties* of Christianity, and this after a most plain and orderly way. As they grow up, and improve in knowledge, they will find, that whatever the holy Scriptures have delivered as necessary to be believed, all that *they* have been taught to believe; that whatever is *fit to be done, commanded by God, praiseworthy*, or *of good report*, all *this they* have been instructed in as their duty.

The consequence of this will be, they will have *no temptation* to look out for new teachers; *no disputes* with themselves or others, whether this is the right way, in which they find themselves engaged; but, suiting their manners to their principles, their minds will be easy, and their lives exemplary. And so in all probability will their children after them for many generations; which, in time, may be a means of healing our unhappy divisions, of making us most *serious* and *concerned* for the great duties of Christianity, the honour of God, and the good of mankind.

The only objection to all this *is*, that wickedness will abound, let what will be done: what will the good education of a few out of so many do towards these great ends?

SERM. LXXIX.

Some people go further, and wish, and hope, that God will appear in some extraordinary manner, to *awaken*, to *convince*, and to *convert* men.

From wishing this, men of warm heads have often come to attempt it; and there has scarce been any age in which some or other have not appeared with such pretences as these, and with new commissions from God for reforming the world: never considering, that the kingdom of God is so often compared by Christ *to corn sown in the earth, to a grain of mustard seed* set in the ground; to signify to us, that the Gospel is to be propagated, and piety increased, by the ordinary methods of providence, and by the *effectual* though silent influences of the Spirit of God; not by *noise*, and *pomp*, and *strange* appearances, which *may* amuse, but have *never* mended the world.

[Mark 4. 26, 31, &c.]

This I am forced to say, to convince those that are engaged in carrying on this good work, that the methods they take for the instruction of children, destitute of help and learning, are most agreeable to the ways of God's appointment, and consequently most likely to promote His glory, and a reformation of manners, so much wished for by all good men.

And why should not we hope for better days even from these small beginnings?

Besides those that are instructed by their pious parents, there are many thousands *at this day* brought up in the knowledge and ways of God, by the care and charity of others. These will not *all* forget their *God*, their *benefactors*, the *principles* in which they have been educated, the duties they have been taught, and the sins they have been warned against?

The great Lord of the world, who blesseth all our other labours with a constant increase, will, no doubt, bless *this undertaking* with a suitable success. And may you see the work of your hands prosper daily, in a number of religious and grateful persons, bred (*by your charity*) in the fear of God, and brought up to get their bread in an honest and commendable way!

Now, to *countenance*, to *promote*, and to *continue*, this great and good work, is what we aim at, and what I am desired to

recommend to your charity at this time. The advantages of forwarding it will be very many; the number of evil examples will every day be lessened; a great many families, *knowing* and *fearing* God, will *in His good time* be established. A great many of these, remembering the hand that raised them, and the way in which this was done, will be ready to continue *this kind of charity* to future generations. In the mean time we shall be no losers by what we give. They that *have children* will entail a blessing upon their own posterity; and they that have *none* are better able to help those who have more than they can well bring up after a Christian manner.

In one word: it is by the good blessing of God that so many of *us* want nothing that is needful either for our souls or bodies. Whatever we are able to give, cometh of God, and of His own do we give Him. Let us then beseech Him to pardon all our vain expenses; to make us so careful of His blessings, as that we may always be able to offer some testimony of our gratitude to God for the many favours we have received from Him, to be given where His providence shall direct us to give.

And the good Lord give a blessing to all our charities, and especially to *this*, that it may continue and answer the ends proposed by it!

SERMON LXXX.

A CHARITY SERMON, PREACHED AT ST. DUNSTAN'S, FEB. 16, 1723.

CONTINUANCE IN WELL-DOING RECOMMENDED AND ENFORCED.

GAL. vi. 9.

Let us not be weary in well-doing: for in due season we shall reap, if we faint not.

THESE words suppose two things: first, *that there is an essential difference betwixt good and evil;* between *well-doing and evil-doing;* which every body is capable of seeing, if it is not plainly their own fault. And,

Secondly, *that Christians, through the corruption of nature, and the wiles of Satan and his instruments, are subject to be weary of well-doing;* and had need to be often put in mind of their duty in this particular, and guarded against the temptations which may otherwise shake their *faith and constancy, and deprive them of their reward.*

These things are *supposed.* That which is *expressly affirmed* is, *that if Christians,* notwithstanding the discouragements they meet with, *faint not, grow not weary of well-doing, they shall certainly receive a reward that will sufficiently recompense their perseverance.*

I. To apply these things to your present improvement, I would first observe to you, that there are several truths so *very plain,* that to go about to prove them would be to *weaken the faith,* and *puzzle the understanding,* of the hearers, rather than be any real advantage to them; and therefore the Spirit of God, in His holy Word, is not solicitous to prove such things as every body endued with reason is supposed to know. For instance: every man is supposed

to know *there is a God, who made the world, and all things in it.* Moses therefore begins the Bible with these words, "In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth;" [Gen. 1. 1.] supposing most justly, that he who will not, from the greatness and beauty of the creatures, acknowledge the Maker of them, all the arguments in the world will not convince him. And the Apostle saith expressly, "that all such are without excuse;" let them pretend want of capacity, want of proof, or what else they please. [Rom. 1. 20.]

The difference betwixt *good* and *evil* is another of those things which require no arguments to make it plainer than it is at first sight. The Apostle tells us, "that the Gentiles, which had not the law" to direct them particularly what to do, and what to avoid, "had yet the work of the law written in their hearts," and knew very well when they did amiss, and when they did otherwise; "their conscience witnessing with them." And therefore the Prophet makes no scruple to pronounce a severe woe to all that "call evil good, and good evil." [Rom. 2. 14, 15.] [Is. 5. 20.]

And they that make it a question, or would make it indifferent, which a man chooses, are either such as are not willing to see the truth, because they will not obey it; or such as take a pleasure in confounding men's notions, that they may have more partners in their infidelity; or lastly, such whose consciences are *seared,* who are given up to a *reprobate mind,* who *seeing, see not,* as our Lord expresses it; who, being under the conduct of Satan, are by him compelled to do all the mischief that is in their power. [1 Tim. 4. 2; Rom. 1. 28; Matt. 13. 13.]

And indeed no other account *can* be given why some men are so indefatigably industrious to set up and promote the kingdom of darkness, by publishing the most blasphemous books; by confounding the distinction betwixt vice and virtue; and by undermining the very foundations of the Christian religion. They have rejected the Lord that bought them; the master they serve will have it so; they are led captive by him at his will.

But although *good* and *evil, virtue* and *vice,* are so easily distinguished, that the "wayfaring men, though fools," as the Prophet speaks, "need not err," need not be mistaken: yet, because the *nice bounds* which separate good [Is. 35. 8.]

SERM. LXXX.

and evil are so easily perceived, that a man can say, *Thus far I can go without sin;* this is made a matter of complaint, when in truth it is so ordered for our good, that we may be obliged to keep at the greatest distance from sin, which we shall certainly do, if we truly *fear* God; and that we may not content ourselves with the lowest degrees of virtue, which we shall never do, if we sincerely *love* God. *The very best we can do,* considering the talents we have received, the circumstances we are placed in by Providence, the temptations we meet with, and the weakness of our nature; these things, I say, considered, *the very best we can do is* THE MEASURE OF OUR DUTY.

And therefore God has commanded unlimited holiness: [Luke 10. 27.] "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and soul, and strength;" that as our endeavours *are,* so may our reward be. He has also forbidden every the least degree of sin, that such as truly fear Him may not be tempted to come near the borders of it, lest by little and little they fall into destruction.

Now, this plain distinction between good and evil, betwixt well-doing and evil-doing, as it leaves all men whatever without excuse, who act against reason and against conscience, and makes them liable to an account and judgment to come, and consequently to rewards and punishments, as their works shall deserve; it must sure be one of the greatest acts of piety and charity, to hinder people from ruining themselves eternally; which all most certainly do, who die in their sins unrepented of.

And though God has made it the duty of parents to train up their children in virtue and piety; though He has appointed an order of men, who stand charged for the souls committed to their care; though he has given us the holy Scriptures, in which we have the words of eternal life, and which are, or may be, in every body's hands; yet there is still room enough for well-disposed Christians to exercise their charity by endeavouring to instruct the ignorant, to secure those that are in the way of life, to convert sinners from the error of their ways, and as much as may be, to better the generations to come. As, therefore, there will always be objects of this kind, so, I doubt not, they will

never want advocates to plead for them, nor hearts disposed to assist in this good work, notwithstanding the attempts of evil minds to discourage both.

For this is not to be concealed, that you *will*, and you ought to *expect to meet with discouragements*.

Corrupt nature is apt *to be weary of well-doing;* wickedness, instead of losing ground, may seem to increase and abound; many, who have had the benefit of your care and pains, may afterwards have been corrupted by the multitude of evil examples; some may have abused your charity, and, instead of being humble and thankful for the blessing of a Christian education, may have grown proud, and conceited, and set themselves above those that have helped to raise them. And lastly, there are not wanting instruments of Satan, who have set themselves to *depreciate*, to *ridicule*, to *cry* down, this *excellent charity*.

These are some of the discouragements you meet with: both you that contribute towards this great work, and you that have undertaken the management of it.

But are you therefore to give it up? God forbid! It is your *duty*, and it is your *interest*, to persevere, notwithstanding the difficulties you have to struggle with. It is your *duty*, as it is *a work of well-doing;* and it is your *interest*, as it may most probably avert the judgments of God from falling upon us.

It is certainly *a work of well-doing*, notwithstanding the many cavils that have been made against it.

The design is the very same with *that* of the Gospel, "To bring men from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan unto God." [Acts 26. 18.]

The way of *doing this is*, and *has been*, to take care of such who have either no parents, or none *able* or *capable* of giving them a Christian education. These are taught to read the Scriptures, which are able to make them wise unto salvation. And that they may see with their own eyes, that we teach them nothing but what God has commanded us to teach them, that they may see the judgments of God upon sinners ever since the world began, and that His promises are sure to the righteous, and to all that fear and serve Him in sincerity and truth; in one word, that they may learn the way

SERM. LXXX.

that leads to life everlasting, and pursue it with the seriousness of men that are in earnest, and hope to be saved.

And because the corruption of human nature is such, that children are very hardly persuaded to see their interest, or to be at the pains to learn the way that leadeth unto life, there have therefore been proper encouragements thought of, and provided, out of the charitable contributions which from time to time have been collected. Some are *clothed;* some are *clothed and fed;* all are provided with books, and all are instructed in the principles of the Christian religion; and such as are towardly, and answer the end of their education, have a certain prospect of being further taken care of.

Now, if this is not a work of *well-doing,* we must despair of ever proving any thing to be so. And therefore good men ought not to be discouraged by the objections of wicked men and unbelievers. They will rather take their objections into consideration; and where any corruption or evil consequence has crept into this good design, they will take care to amend and prevent it for the future. For instance: such as have the immediate care of instructing them, will make it their great business to be always instilling into them the great duties of *humility* and *gratitude,* that they may not forget the condition from whence they were taken, nor the Providence that has raised up means of procuring for them a Christian education.

It is but too natural, *it must be confessed,* for children that have been thus educated, *and very often for their parents too,* because they *have had* an orderly education, to think them *too good for servile employments;* never considering, that they must, *very probably,* have continued in the very *lowest rank and condition,* without any distinct knowledge of God, and without any qualifications for a laudable employment, all the days of their life, had not God and good Christians provided better for them.

Now, to make this a pretence for their not being useful in their generation, *in any honest employment whatever,* which the providence of God, or the wisdom of the trustees for these charities shall assign them, is such *an ingratitude,* such *a forgetfulness,* as should by all means be guarded against; otherwise the consequence *most certainly* will be, that the

children of many of those charitable persons who have contributed to *their* better education, must be obliged to accept of those meaner services and offices of life, which they think themselves too good for. And this at last will be a discouragement to this pious work.

And *this*, as was before said, should be the great concern of those to whom their education is intrusted to prevent, as much as may be, *that their hearts may not be lifted up above their condition;* but that they be often put in mind of the condition they would have been in, of *poverty, ignorance,* and *infidelity, it may be,* had not they been delivered by this happy providence; that pride will very ill become those who have been raised by charity; that *He* who had all things in His power, made choice of the cross; and though all nature was at His command, yet He was content with a very little, to teach us to be resigned in every condition of life; and lastly, that he who has more than he deserves (*and who can say he has not?*) has no reason to complain, or think himself overlooked, if he has not the place he aims at.

Let us but guard against *this objection,* and it will not be in the power of *evil men,* or of *evil spirits,* to bring an accusation against you, as if you were not engaged in *well-doing.* And you have no reason to fear their malicious calumnies, nor be concerned at the reproach which bad men would fling upon you, or upon the work you are engaged in.

They that speak against this work do, in effect, say, that to teach children the fear of God, and the knowledge of their duty, is to make them useless in their generation; that to teach them to be dutiful to their parents, will make them worse children; to be true and just in their dealings, will make them worse servants; to do their duty in that state of life which the providence of God shall assign them, will make them less useful to the world. In short; that religion is not consistent with the duties of a civil life; and that, provided the rich can but have the labour and bodies of the poor at their service, it is no matter what becomes of their souls. These are some of the wild reasonings, and consequences of the arguments, of *those* that are enemies to the charity schools. They are too absurd to be confuted seriously.

SERM. LXXX.

II. We shall therefore now come to consider that which is expressly affirmed in the text, namely, *That if Christians, notwithstanding the discouragements they meet with, faint not, grow not weary of well-doing, they shall certainly reap the fruit of their labour, and receive a reward that shall sufficiently recompense their perseverance.*

The Christian faith can never be destroyed; that we are sure of: we have God's word for it, "that the gates of hell shall not prevail against His Church," in which the true faith is preserved. But then we are as sure that God will try the faith of particular Christians, and of particular churches. St. John saith, "that there is an hour of temptation, which shall come upon all the world, to try them that dwell upon the earth."

Matt. 16. 18.

Rev. 3. 10.

The generations before us have had their proper trials. Some have been persecuted for their faith, even unto death; and have thereby secured to themselves a crown of life. Others have fainted, and lost their reward. Even *national churches* have been so far corrupted in their faith, as to provoke God "to remove their candlestick;" to deprive them of that light and Gospel, which they perverted, and of the means of grace and salvation, which they despised.

God be praised! it is not so very ill *with us* yet. But, in good truth, we are in the ready way to have our *faith* corrupted, as well as our *manners*, if Christians are not a little more concerned *for*, and convinced *of*, the necessity *of holding the mystery of faith in a pure conscience;* that is, of *believing* well, as well as *living* well.

Pray hear what St. Jude saith to this purpose: [ver. 3.] "Beloved, when I gave all diligence to write unto you of the common salvation, it was needful for me to write unto you, and exhort you, that ye should earnestly contend for the faith which was once delivered unto the saints."

Here is *the faith*, that is, a certain number of truths necessary to salvation, delivered to the saints or Christians, which they were bound to receive, and *contend for*, as they would hope for salvation. *This faith* has been delivered down to us. Into *this faith* we have been baptized. All our hopes of *God's favour*, of the *pardon of our sins*, of the

divine assistance, and of *everlasting life after death,* all depend upon our heartily embracing *this faith,* and upon our living as if we did indeed believe what we profess.

And let us assure ourselves, good Christians, *that it is not indifferent* (as some people are apt to think) *what we believe, provided we live well.* For though a good life be necessary to salvation, yet it must be the effect of a true faith, without which we must not hope to please God. Our Lord Himself told the Jews, "If ye believe not that I am He, ye shall die in your sins." And in another place, "He that believeth not shall be damned." [John 8. 24; Mark 16. 16.]

Now Christians, they who would not run such hazards, ought to be careful not to suffer themselves to be shaken by every wind of doctrine that is every day stirring, neither to be *argued* nor *laughed* out of their religion and their hopes of heaven. I say, *laughed out of their religion,* because there have been people, who would have laid down their lives rather than have denied any one article of the Christian faith, and yet have not been able to resist the weak attacks of an infidel companion, though his great strength has lain in nothing more than in a bold contempt of God's Word and His ministers, in making a jest of things sacred, and bantering such as believed them.

To prevent this method and mischief from spreading, and well-meaning Christians from yielding to such devices of Satan, we should well consider, that there is nothing in true religion which a Christian need be ashamed of; that a man may have truth on his side, and yet not be able to answer all the cavils of a subtile adversary; that the Church has provided for the safety of all her members, having collected all the great truths of the Gospel into her creeds, which are constantly repeated, that every member of her communion may know what is necessarily to be believed and closely adhered to, and consequently what is false and to be rejected; that if a Christian has undeniable reasons, that God has revealed any truth or article of religion, he is bound to receive and believe it, though he should not be able to comprehend every thing relating to it, or be able to answer every question that may be asked concerning it; that a truth once received upon these grounds,—THIS GOD HAS RE-

SERM. LXXX.

VEALED: every thing contrary to it must be false, let who will affirm it. Lastly, that *sincere piety* will always be found to be the very best security against the damnable errors of the times. I say, *sincere piety*, such as is found in the way which Christ has appointed for the salvation of sinners; otherwise it may be but a delusion, and no sure defence against error.

My meaning, and the truth is, If people will despise or neglect the ordinances of the Gospel, or are indifferent whether they are in communion with a sound part of the Catholic Church or not; if they wantonly profane the Lord's day, and regard not the assemblies of the faithful, where God has promised His presence and graces; if they hear the Word of God, the Word of eternal life, with indifference; if they pray without reverence and without concern, and without a full purpose of forsaking every evil way; if they are not careful to keep out of the way of temptation, but wantonly give ear to every scorner, not considering what the Spirit has forewarned them of, "that evil communications corrupt good manners;" lastly, if they *have believed,* and yet *are not careful to maintain good works,* they *must* not think it strange if they fall into errors. God indeed has promised His grace to defend us against the delusions of Satan and his instruments; but then, if we would be sure to know any doctrine whether it be of God, we must be sure sincerely *to desire to do the will of God.*

[1 Cor. 15. 33.]
Tit. 3. 8.
[John 7. 17.]

The will of God is, *that all men should be saved, and come to the knowledge of the truth.* The means of salvation He Himself has appointed. If we sincerely *seek after, accept of,* and *close with these;* if we persevere in the use of *these means,* and in *well-doing;* we shall certainly receive the end of our faith, even *the salvation of our souls.*

We say, *in well-doing;* for we all know what St. James affirms, that "faith without works is dead." It is of no more use than a dead man is to the world.

[James 2. 17, 20.]

Now, there are an infinite number of GOOD WORKS, useful to men, and acceptable to God. But every man, and every order of men, have some duties, some good works, so peculiarly belonging to their place and circumstances, that all others would be useless, if these should be omitted. For

indeed, Christian virtue consists in this: *that every duty have its proper place and concern.* For instance:

The first duty and great concern of a *clergyman* is, to take care of the flock committed to his charge; of a *parent,* to take care of his children; of a *magistrate,* to preserve peace, and to do justice; of *servants,* to be faithful to their masters; of the *rich,* to take care of the poor; and of the *poor,* to be content with their condition.

And if a man should be never so zealous in other instances of *well-doing,* and neglect these relative duties, and such as peculiarly belong to his condition of life, he would want one of the surest marks of his being under the conduct of the Spirit of God; and of reaping the fruits of his labours, and the reward of a faithful servant.

This order of Providence, therefore, being *first* regarded, the next thing that a good man will do, will be to consider, *how he may be most useful in his generation?* And having before his eyes the words of the Apostle, immediately going before the text, "Whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap; he that soweth to the flesh, shall of the flesh reap corruption; but he that soweth to the Spirit, shall of the Spirit reap life everlasting;" he concludes, from these words, that whatever is unnecessarily laid out upon the body, is all entirely lost at death, *when that body sees corruption.* And that whatever can be spared, and is bestowed in promoting the glory of God, and the good of mankind, that this is *laying up a treasure in heaven,* and that we shall reap the fruits thereof to all eternity. He therefore resolves to look beyond the grave, and to make some provision for a life that is to last so long. [Gal. 6. 7, 8.]

Now if a Christian, *thus* affected, and *thus* resolved, should desire to know how (as Solomon speaks), "He may sow in righteousness, so as to reap a sure reward;" one cannot, perhaps, direct him to a better charity than something like this before us, where the bodies and the souls of the poor are provided for; where parents receive both relief and comfort in the care that is taken of their children; where so many children are taught to *know,* and to *fear* God. Prov. 11. 18.

By which charity many thousands *have been,* and many thousands are *like to be,* rescued from extreme poverty, and

SERM. LXXX.

the consequences of it: which are, too often, *want of instruction, gross ignorance, great temptations to vice, and a proneness to run into it.*

By which charity the number of evil examples will every day be lessened; a great many families, *knowing and fearing God,* will (in His good time) be established; a great many of these, in all probability, gratefully remembering the method and way by which they were raised, will hereafter contribute towards continuing this way *of well-doing* to future generations.

In the mean time, neither they that are the *managers,* nor they that *contribute* towards this good work, will have any reason to despond. It is seed sown; and it will have its increase most certainly. We see it so in the common course of husbandry. When the corn is sown, it is left to the ordinary providence and blessing of God, who gives an increase according to the goodness of the ground, and the means made use of to improve it.

Now, the kingdom of heaven is compared *to seed sown in the ground,* to give Christians an idea, and an assurance, that their *spiritual labours,* their endeavours for the good of their souls, will as certainly be recompensed as their temporal labours for the support of their bodies.

They shall see the *fruit,* and they shall receive the *reward,* of their labours. They will see those, whom they have plucked as fire-brands out of the fire, giving God eternal praises for His goodness in making *them* the instruments of their conversion and salvation. And they will find *the Lord of heaven and earth,* who needs none of our services, yet condescending to accept our poor endeavours, and to reward them beyond our utmost wishes. Sufficient, one would hope, to make us bear with patience all the discouragements we can possibly meet with!

Happy will it be for us, if the frequent occasions of this kind we meet with shall make us more careful so to husband the talents wherewith we are entrusted, as that we may always have whereof to offer a testimony of our gratitude to our great Benefactor.

And the good Lord accept of and give a blessing to all our charities, and grant that they may obtain for us *this*

comfort, that so much as we have given to God, and to these good purposes, so much treasure we have laid up in heaven.

For which place, may the good God *prepare* and *bring* us all, for the Lord Jesus Christ's sake.

To Whom, with the Father and the Holy Ghost, be all honour and glory, world without end. Amen.

SERMON LXXXI.

PREACHED AT A CONFIRMATION.

THE ORDINANCES OF GOD ATTENDED WITH CERTAIN, THOUGH INVISIBLE EFFECTS.

JOHN iii. 7, 8.

See 1 Pet. 1. 23; 1 John 3. 1. *Marvel not that I said unto thee, ye must be born again. The wind bloweth where it listeth, and thou hearest the sound thereof, but canst not tell whence it cometh, and whither it goeth: so is every one that is born of the Spirit.*

THE occasion of these words was this: Nicodemus, a ruler of the Jews, considering the wonders which Jesus Christ did, concluded that He was certainly *a teacher come from God;* he was therefore desirous to know of Jesus, whether God designed to make known to His people *by Him* more than He had revealed to them by Moses and the prophets?

Jesus answered him, "That which I am come to teach you is *this:* that whoever hopes for happiness in the life to come, *must be born again,* or *from above.*"

Nicodemus not understanding this way of speaking, *though he was a master of Israel,* and wondering how a man could be born again, our Lord proceeds to tell him, ver. 6, "That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the spirit is spirit." That which you call life, and which you received from your parents, is but a *mortal life,* which subjects you to sin and to death. Your parents were sinners, and so are you, and such will your children be after you; you have lost the *image* of God, in which you were created, and nothing *on earth* can restore you to *that,* and to God's favour.

I do therefore (saith our Lord) solemnly assure you, "that except a person be born of water and of the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God;" that is, unless he be *baptized*, and *by that means* made a member of Christ's Church, a child of God, and an heir of the kingdom of heaven, he cannot partake of that Spirit, from above, which is absolutely necessary to change our nature, to make us *new creatures*, and to fit us for heaven and happiness everlasting. ver. 5.

Nicodemus not understanding how such a ceremony as baptism should be a means of obtaining that Spirit; or how the Spirit, *which we cannot see*, should be able to work such a mighty change; our Lord proceeds to convince him, by a familiar instance, that such a thing is not impossible, nor unlikely: "The wind," saith He, "bloweth where it listeth, and thou hearest the sound thereof, but canst not tell whence it cometh, and whither it goeth;" that is, though the wind be invisible, yet we find the effects of it very plainly, and in a thousand ways. In like manner, though the Spirit of God be not seen by men, yet He produces very strange effects in those to whom He is communicated. He enables them to subdue their corruptions; He enlightens their understandings; He changes their hearts; He gives them new thoughts, new desires, new affections; in short, if they do not drive Him from them, He will make them *new creatures*, and fit for that happiness which God designed at first to bestow upon them.

Now, from all this it appears, that if we continue in the state in which we were born, we are certainly undone; "For that which is born of the flesh is flesh." That we can only be restored by the Spirit of God: "By grace ye are saved." That *baptism* is indeed the ordinary means of salvation; but that baptism does not save us, as it is the putting away the filth of the flesh, but the answer of a good conscience, bearing witness that we have the Spirit of God. In short; that nothing but becoming *new creatures* can fit us for heaven; and that nothing but the Spirit of God, communicated to us in His holy ordinances, can make this *new creation.* [John 3. 6; Eph. 2. 8.]

Now, though these things are as plain from the Holy Scriptures as truths *can* be; yet it is as sure they are too often *overlooked, neglected,* or *despised,* by people of *careless*

SERM. LXXXI.

or *profane* minds, who will believe nothing but what they can see with their eyes, or what is agreeable to their own corrupt taste of things; who will (with Nicodemus) not only say, *How can these things be?* but despise those whose duty it is to press the consideration of them upon their hearers.

[John 3. 9.]

It is for this reason, good Christians, that I have made choice of these words of Christ, "The wind bloweth where it listeth, and thou hearest the sound thereof, but canst not tell whence it cometh, and whither it goeth: so is every one that is born of the Spirit." I have made choice of these words, in order to establish you in the truth, and to convince you, that the ordinances of God are attended with as certain effects as any thing in nature: and that the fruits of the Spirit, *in all faithful Christians,* may as plainly be perceived as the *wind* when it blows, or the *sun* when it shines.

It is true, *we are to live by faith, and not by sight;* we are to make use of the means of grace which God has ordained, and we are to trust His word and promise, that He will bestow the graces which He has assured us *shall* attend His ordinances; but then, though the grace be invisible, the fruits thereof are easily discerned.

Acts 2. 38.

Thus we are "baptized for the remission of sins." *Here is an outward visible sign of an inward and invisible grace.* But then this grace becomes *visible* in the lives of all such as are truly *regenerate.* It is easily seen who *have,* and who have *not,* retained the Spirit of God communicated unto them in baptism. The children of God, and the children of the devil, are as manifest as light is from darkness. "He that doeth righteousness is of God," saith St. John: "and he that doeth not righteousness is not of God."

1 John 3. 10.

And here, good Christians, take notice, once for all, of what the word of God, as well as sad experience, assures us; that we are born in sin; that we are by nature liable to the wrath of God; that of ourselves we are not able to think one good thought, much less are we able to help ourselves out of this sad condition.

But then, God of His infinite mercy has delivered us out of this sad estate. We are reconciled unto God by the death of His Son, who, that He may fit us for heaven and happiness, hath appointed several ordinances, in the due use of

which we may certainly expect the assistance of His Spirit, to renew our nature, and to restore us to the image of God, from which we are sadly fallen.

And though these ordinances, and the instruments He makes use of, have no manner of virtue in themselves, to renew and to restore us to the favour of God; and though the power that accompanies them be as invisible as the wind; yet the effect and blessing that attends the due use of them is as certain as that God is true.

Thus, for instance, He has appointed certain persons, men of like infirmities with yourselves, to be His ministers or stewards. To them He has committed *the word of reconciliation,* and the several ordinances which He has appointed to make it effectual. [2 Cor. 5. 19.]

By virtue of this commission, they *baptize* your children, by which they are made members of Christ's Church, children of God, and heirs of the kingdom of heaven.

By virtue of the same commission, they endeavour to fit them for *confirmation,* that they may thereby receive the Holy Spirit, by which they are sealed unto the day of redemption, and are enabled to pass through a corrupt world, and to escape from their most powerful enemies.

And lastly, because by reason of the frailty of our nature we are but too apt to fall, by virtue of this commission, these ministers of Christ restore you again by a godly discipline, absolving those that are truly penitent, and sealing their pardon by administering unto them the body and blood of Christ, by which alone we obtain remission of our sins.

Well now; will you, because these ministers of God are men like yourselves, will you despise their ministry, and the favours offered you by their hands; and refuse to be reconciled to God by their means? Or will you despise the ordinances of God, because the graces that attend them are invisible? Will you, because some profane person may say, *what signifies a little water?* will you therefore refuse to baptize your children? Or because another, as ignorant and profane, shall ask you, *what will you be the better for the bishop's blessing, and the laying his hands upon you?* will you therefore despise *confirmation,* though it is an ordinance of the Church?

SERM. LXXXI.

To proceed: because bread and wine are common things, and every body can *take*, and *eat*, and *drink* of them, will you therefore despise these creatures, when they are consecrated in the Lord's Supper by His ministers appointed thereunto?

It is true, the graces that accompany all these holy ordinances are not visible, no more is God that bestows them; and yet we believe *Him* to be; and have not we *His* word and ordinance for the truth of these things?

And are there not many holy persons, (the Lord increase their number!) who, by the use of these ordinances, being rescued out of the power and snare of the devil, do very sensibly perceive the work of the Spirit of God in their hearts, and the fruits of it in their *lives*. And, on the other hand, are there not men *given up to a reprobate mind*, who are incapable of advice, and *commit all iniquity with greediness?*

Do but consider the reason of this. They are as much in their senses as other men. They have heard it over and over again, that eternal misery is like to be their portion; and yet they go on without fear, and without concern. And the reason is, they have grieved the good Spirit of God, by which they had been sealed unto the day of redemption; the Spirit of the Lord has forsaken them, and an evil spirit has taken possession of them; and though they can see neither the one nor the other, yet the effects are plain: "The tree is known by its fruits;" and by the life any man leads, it is easily seen what spirit governs him.

[Matt. 12. 33.]

I have used all these arguments to secure you from a spirit of error and wickedness too frequent in the world, which would persuade men to believe nothing but what they see with their eyes; who, because they have driven the Spirit of God from them, and no longer feel His power in themselves, do therefore deride it in all others; who despise public ordinances, and would bring us back into the state of heathens who know not God.

But ye, good Christians, have been taught better things. Your Saviour tells you, "that ye must be born again," or else you can neither be *holy* here, nor *happy* hereafter: man by nature being *born* in sin, and utterly incapable of reforming himself without the *divine assistance*.

[John 3. 7.]

And this is what I design to explain to you, that you may acknowledge the grace of God, and be careful not to *grieve that Holy Spirit by which you are sanctified.* [Eph. 4. 30.]

I. And in the first place, take notice, *that the great design of the Christian religion is, to recover man from the state of corruption, into which he is fallen, to a state of perfection,* and to secure him in it, until God thinks fit to call him out of this world to a much better.

Now, *this cannot be done* BUT BY THE SPIRIT OF GOD. Neither the law of Moses, nor the law of nature; no, not the state of innocence, was sufficient to direct and secure man from falling, without an especial grace of God.

The Jews had a law both holy, just, and good, and yet they became a most wicked people. The Gentiles had all the advantages of reason and learning, and yet they fell into the most monstrous sins.

St. Paul, in his epistle to the Romans, is forced to put both Jews and Gentiles in mind of this, that he might more effectually recommend the grace of God afforded in the Gospel to all true believers.

And indeed Jesus Christ did not come into the world, till the fulness of time; that is, until the whole world *were,* or *might have been* convinced, that there was need of further help to save them from ruin, and to make them perfect, besides their own free will, their reason, or learning, or the best law that could be given them. And this must be the work of the Holy Ghost alone.

For this end we are dedicated to the Holy Ghost in *baptism,* that He may take us under His especial care; that He may enlighten our *understandings* with saving knowledge; that He may subdue our *wills* to the will of God; and that He may change our *affections,* from following after vanity, to love those things which are above; that being made *partakers of a divine nature,* God may own us for His children, and, when we die, give us an inheritance with the saints in glory. [2 Pet. 1. 4.]

In short; this is the great rule of the Gospel: "Without holiness no man shall see the Lord." "They that are led by the Spirit of God, they are the sons of God," being sanctified by the Holy Ghost. To *them,* and to *them only, belongs the inheritance.* Heb. 12. 14. [Rom. 8. 14.]

SERM. LXXXI.

And this is the reason that I would persuade you all, good Christians, not to deceive yourselves, or to place *the new birth* we are speaking of in any thing but in a *new life*. This is what all the ordinances of God aim at.

We are therefore baptized, that, being within the covenant of grace, we may have the assistance of God's Spirit to enable us to become new creatures. And if we value baptism upon any other account, we mistake the end of that ordinance.

II. *Confirmation* is an holy usage, received from the Apostles; and very wrong it would be to neglect it. But then those that come not to be *confirmed*, with full purposes, by the assistance of the Holy Ghost, of keeping the vows that they take upon them, are in as ill an estate as if they had never been confirmed.

III. We look upon *prayer* as a most necessary duty, and so indeed it is. But then a Christian would be sadly mistaken, if he should conclude himself to be a new creature, and in the favour of God, purely because he *prays*, unless he finds the fruits of his prayers in being better able to subdue his corrupt affections by the Spirit of God, which God vouchsafes to all that pray to Him in sincerity.

IV. *Hearing the Word of God* is a necessary duty;—nobody denies it. But if a Christian, when he has heard the manner of his redemption, the sins he is to avoid, and the duties he is to practise; if he grows no better, if the work of holiness does not go forward, it is a sure sign he mistakes the very end of hearing.

V. The *Lord's Supper* is truly esteemed one of the most solemn ordinances of the Christian religion, and a testimony of our being in communion with Christ and with His Church. But now, if a Christian, in unity with the Christian Church, does not live as becomes a member of Christ, he condemns himself, and *eats* and *drinks* his own destruction.

In one word; Christians should be very careful not to place holiness in actions which do not make us one jot the better. A wicked unregenerate man can do all these things, *as to outward appearance*, as well as the most holy.

Let me therefore just set before you *the true marks of holiness*, that you may always remember in what it consists.

It consists then in such a change of the heart, as that a man desires and strives to please God, out of a sense of love and duty to Him. So saith St. John: *Whoso keepeth His word, in him verily is the love of God perfected.* [1 John 2. 5.]

And though, through the weakness of our nature, our obedience may not be perfect, yet it may be sincere; and so it must be, or it will never be accepted: that is, we must hate all sin, strive against it, avoid all temptations to it; we must live in the fear of God, beg His pardon when we have done amiss, pray earnestly for the assistance of His Holy Spirit, and be always striving to get the mastery over our corruptions; and God, who sees our sincerity, will pardon our imperfections, and increase our graces daily.

To conclude: by this action of yours, you secure to yourselves the protection of God, under which you may be secure from fear of evil.

But then, take this along with you, that it will require *care*, and *pains*, and *self-denial*, and *prayers*, to secure the favour of God, and the continuance of His grace. But then, you will not think these so very hard conditions, if you consider the joys that are set before you, even an *eternal happiness*.

And if the difficulties of an holy life affright you,—if the commands of Jesus Christ seem hard to flesh and blood,—do but consider, *who can dwell with everlasting burnings?* [Is. 33. 14.] And it is to be hoped, you will change your mind, and be at any pains to escape so frightful a judgment.

It concerns you to know it, and it is our duty to tell you, that it is much easier *now* to begin to lead a Christian life, than it will be hereafter, when *evil habits* are become a second nature, when *evil company* shall have corrupted your manners, when *evil discourse* shall have corrupted your principles.

It was for this reason the Spirit of God has left this advice upon record, REMEMBER THY CREATOR IN THE DAYS OF THY YOUTH; that is, before sin and hell get the dominion over you. [Eccl. 12. 1.]

It will therefore be your *interest*, as it is your *duty*, from this day forward, to be very careful of your ways, to take all opportunities of learning your duty, to pray daily to God for

SERM. LXXXI.

the continuance of His grace, and to give Him thanks for the favours you enjoy.

But if, instead of doing this, you presently forget the vows you have taken upon you, and fall into any scandalous sins, or into a careless way of living, then this whole congregation will be witnesses against you, that you lied unto God, when you promised to lead a sober and a Christian life.

But we will hope better things of you, and that you will from this time become a comfort to your friends, and to those that have taken pains to instruct you; a credit to the religion you profess, and an honour to God.

And now, take notice, that you have been faithfully instructed in the nature of the covenant of baptism, which you have now renewed, and you can never be too thankful to those that have taken pains to fit you for this holy ordinance. You have been plainly told of the danger you are liable to, of the enemies you have to deal with, of the difficulties of an holy life, of the necessity of God's grace, and of using the means to attain it. All that we can do farther for you is, to offer up our prayers to God for you, that you may for the remainder of your lives live worthy of your Christian profession; and that knowing that you are the servants of the living God, you may walk as in His sight, avoid all such things as are contrary to your profession, and follow all such things as are agreeable to the same.

And may God, Who has made you His children by adoption, bring you in His good time to His everlasting kingdom, for Jesus Christ's sake, the Son of His love! To Whom, with the Father and the Holy Ghost, be all honour, thanksgiving, and praise, now and for ever.

SERMON LXXXII.

PREACHED AT A CONFIRMATION.

THE DANGER OF LIVING, LIKE CHILDREN, AT ALL ADVENTURES, WITHOUT THOUGHT, OR REASON, OR FEAR, OR STEADINESS.

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1 Cor. xiii. 11.

When I was a child, I spake as a child, I understood as a child, I thought as a child: but when I became a man, I put away childish things.

The Apostle's design in these words is to shew the *great difference* there will be betwixt our knowledge in *this life* and in *the life to come*,—even as great as betwixt the weak and foolish thoughts of *children*, and the sober reasonings of *men*.

He supposeth, that if men are not very much wanting to themselves, they will *think*, and *live*, and *reason*, and *speak*, at another rate than they did when they were children.

And so they certainly *will*, if they have made use of that reason, and those opportunities of improving their understanding, which God has afforded them in His holy Word. But they do not always do so.

Hence it comes to pass, that the greatest part of men spend their *thoughts* and *time* about things as little to the purpose as the merest children. People will hardly believe this. It is necessary, therefore, that they should be convinced of it, and see the danger of living like children, at all adventures, without *thought*, or *reason*, or *fear*, or *sense*.

If children have no *foresight*; if they have no *serious aim*, or *design*, in any thing they do; if they *fear no evil*; if they

SERM. LXXXII.

are apt to be *tossed to and fro,* and know not what to believe or do; why, *this is their character,* we look for no better from them.

And if we blame them for being *ignorant, foolish* in their choices, *careless* of their ways, it is to cure them of their faults, lest these vices should grow up with them, and when *for the time* they should be men in understanding, they should continue to have the *folly,* the *weakness,* the *ignorance of children.*

Now, whatever we think of ourselves, this is the case of an infinite number of people, who grow older without being wiser to any good purposes. And who, when they leave the world, have "no sign of virtue to shew."

Wisd. 5. 13.

We should be convinced of this, if we had but the patience to compare *our thoughts,* and *words,* and *actions,* with the designs and manners of children, whom we despise for their weaknesses, and correct for their follies.

Now, though such a comparison may be very uneasy, yet, since it may put us upon considering whether we are as wise as *men* should be, I will choose this *very plain way of instruction.*

I. And *first,* this is the character of children, *to be very ignorant;* or, as God is pleased to express it, *not to know their right hand from their left.* We hope that *time* and *age* will cure this; and we are often at a great deal of pains and expense to improve their understandings; and we are well satisfied when we see that they know the world, and are like to live in it. But neither we, nor they, consider what a sad thing it is *to know the world,* without knowing its *snares,* and *temptations,* and *dangers,* and how to avoid them. And yet this is what men seldom teach their children,—seldom learn themselves. And what is the consequence of this? Why, generally speaking, both *old* and *young* live in a dark ignorance of what concerns another world. And though they are well acquainted with the names of *religion,* of *Christianity,* of *God* that made them, of *heaven* the portion of His faithful servants, and of *hell* the just reward of the wicked; yet they consider no more how people ought to live, who have heard of these things, than their very children, who only know them by rote.

Jonah 4. 11.

Now, this is a truth which can never be sufficiently lamented,—that when people come to years, they do not seriously endeavour to possess their hearts and minds with saving knowledge, and a just concern for their souls. For what will all other knowledge profit a man who does not know how to escape the temptations of a wicked world, how to please God, and how he may save his soul from eternal death?

There may be some excuse, if, while they are children, they do not know these things. But to let this ignorance grow up with us, and when we are *men,* and capable of understanding the things we have been taught, and that our everlasting interest lies at stake, we are plainly without excuse, not to consider things of so great concern to us.

II. Another character of children is, *that they have no apprehensions of future evils.* The present is what most affects them, and it is often to no purpose that you speak to them of *spiritual enemies,* of the anger of God, and of the terrors of the world to come. And the misery is, this *fearless temper* grows up with them, and they learn to live in a *careless security* all their days.

And what can we say to awaken them? Shall we often repeat what the Holy Scriptures tell us of such as live without God in the world? Shall we assure them, that all the judgments mentioned in the Bible, and executed upon ungodly men, are but faint representations of the worm that never dies, and the *fire* that never shall be quenched?

Alas! this is what they have often heard, and what they profess to know, and believe; but indeed they do neither. For who can be *fearless* and *unconcerned* at the thoughts of eternal death, though at some distance? *None but children, who cannot consider; and fools, who make a mock of sin.*

III. Another character of children is, *to live without any aim, or end of their actions.* We blame them for this, we ask them what they propose to themselves? We assure them, that if they once get an evil habit of living at random, and without design, they will be unsettled all their life long, and miserable at the last. We desire they would consider, that they did not come into the world only to eat, and drink, and sleep, and take their pleasure; that this is merely the *life of*

SERM. LXXXII.

a beast; and that since God has given them an understanding soul, He expects they should make use of their reason in proposing to themselves an *end worthy of their creation.*

By such arguments as these, we endeavour to *fix their minds,* that they may *think* and apply themselves to something, and *be of some use in their generation.*

Well then; will *unthoughtfulness* ruin our children, and will it not hurt ourselves? Shall we blame them for not *thinking* why they live, or what will become of them? And shall we never blame ourselves, when we know in our conscience, that we have never seriously thought of *this short question, What was I made for?*

Why, you will say, do not all Christians know, *that the salvation of their souls* is what they were sent into the world for? Do not all Christians propose *that* to themselves, and doubt not but at last they shall be happy? Yes; just as children do, without ever considering in good earnest, what is the happiness they hope for, how it is to be obtained, what God expects of such as shall be admitted into heaven, and what will certainly hinder men from ever going thither.

In short; we hope for happiness in general, without saying to ourselves, As I hope for happiness, I must *first seek the kingdom of God, and His righteousness;* that is, I must, *before all things,* study to *know* what the Christian religion proposes to us, what it requires of us, what is the *will* of God, and how we may *do His will.* Without this, we shall be still like *children,* trying one thing after another, looking and hoping for happiness and satisfaction every where, and always meeting with *disappointments:* because we do not seriously say, *this* is the happiness I was made for, *this* I must think of, *this* I must labour for, whatever else I lose or neglect.

And we think and speak like *men,* when we make *this* our great aim; and resolve, that by the grace of God, neither *business,* nor *pleasures,* nor any other thing, shall divert us from *working out our salvation* with a concern becoming so great a prize.

And though a Christian must live in the world, and must take care of himself, and of those that depend upon him, yet still he remembers, that *this is not the world he was made for;* that *he is hastening to another world,* which therefore he

strives to keep his eye upon, lest the *hurry* or the *pleasures* of this world should divert him from thinking upon God, who is the fountain of eternal blessedness, and loving Him with all the powers of his soul.

He considers, that let his circumstances *here* be what they will, he must take thought for *hereafter*, or be undone for ever; that if his condition be never so hard, he may, in God's good time, see an end of his sorrows; and if he has never so many enjoyments, he must leave them all in a very short time; that therefore it will be no sense to make *that* one's *aim*, and *choice*, and *delight*, which we *know* can never make us happy, which has deceived us a thousand times, and which we should utterly despise, if we did but once truly consider the happiness God proposes to us.

And why should we not consider it? We have very many reasons to do so, if either the truth of God, the greatness of the reward, or the disappointments of this life, have any weight with us.

To conclude, therefore, this particular: we are not surprised when we see a *child* fond of some gaudy thing, which in truth is worth very little, and only pleaseth the senses. But then, are there not *men* as weak? Are there not *men* who, as Job expresses it, "Say unto gold, thou art my hope; saying unto the fine gold, thou art my confidence;" that is, whose hearts are entirely set upon their riches, which, after all, are of no *real value?* Are there not people who are so extremely fond of pleasures, that they will not *deny* themselves, let what will follow? And can any thing be more childish, than to make *that* their own main end, which all people are agreed in would be the ruin of their children? [chap. 31. 24.]

IV. Lastly; there is another *weakness* for which we justly blame and correct our *children*, and that is, *they are unstable in all their ways*. The Apostle takes notice of this character of children, and tells us how ill it would become *men* to be, like *them, tossed to and fro* by every temptation. Eph. 4. 14.

And indeed we easily see in *children* the mischief of being *giddy* and *uncertain*. We see plainly what it will end in; and that if this *unsteadiness of temper* be indulged, they will be in danger of wasting their whole life in purposes and designs which will end in nothing except their *ruin*.

SERM. LXXXII.

Now if this be the character of very many, *even when they come to be men,* it will serve at least to convince us of our weakness and folly, and to leave us inexcusable, if we do not amend.

And that *this* is so, we need but look every man into his own life, and we shall find a strange *fickleness* and *uncertainty* even in those things which we *own* to be of the *greatest concern* to us. For instance:

How often have we proposed to begin a new life, when all has come to nothing! How often have we forgot the *mercies* we have received, the *fears* we have been under, the *promises* we have made of better obedience, and after all have returned again to our iniquities! Can there be any *weakness* in children more blameable than *this;* or any fault in *men* more necessary to be mended?

And now, to what end have we been making *this comparison,* and endeavouring to shew that the generality of *men* have all the *ignorance, weakness,* and *inconstancy,* of *children?* Is it not, that we may perceive our own blindness? That we may open our eyes, and see, before it be too late, the danger of *living without God in the world?* In one word; that we may act like *men,* who have reason given them, and an opportunity of working out their own salvation, if they are not wanting to themselves.

What, therefore, I have further to say upon this subject shall be upon *this head;* namely, *that whatever favour God may shew to the ignorance and mistakes of children, He requires of men that they do in good earnest take care of their own souls.* That therefore Christians must not think of being saved, *without knowing the will of God,* and *without great care to do what they know will please Him.*

Now, when I say that Christians should know *the will of God,* I mean that they should not only learn the principles of Christianity, which most people think it enough to do, but that they should understand the *manner of their redemption;* which will require *some pains,* and *thoughts of heart,* before a man shall be thoroughly convinced of the necessity of an holy life, and of obtaining the grace of God which is necessary to lead such a life.

It is necessary, for example, that a man should know, and

that too from his own heart and experience, *the sad condition a sinner is in, without the help of a Redeemer.* It is plainly for want of knowing this as *they should do,* that Christians are so little concerned to *make their peace with God.* For if they did really know that they are by nature *enemies to God;* that if they are not received into favour, they are undone for ever; that God will not receive them into favour but upon their *true repentance;* that *true repentance* is a very *difficult work;* that without a lively faith in Jesus Christ, all our endeavours after happiness will be to no manner of purpose; that *such a faith* is not to be obtained without *earnest prayers,* a *great humility,* and denying one's-self a great many things for which we have naturally a very earnest desire: if these things were but considered, religion would appear to be a *very serious business,* and people would not, *like children,* hope to go to heaven without any thought or pains. They would not think it sufficient to have learned a few precepts when they were young; to go now and then to God's house; to abstain from some great and vile sins, which make a man abominable in the very eye of the world.

Christianity is quite another thing. *It is that which is to restore us to the favour of God,* whom *sin* has made *our enemy.* And this it does, by *changing us entirely* from what we are by nature. So that a man may be sure he must not go to heaven, if *such a change* is not wrought in him before he dies. If *this* will not make us serious, and concerned to know our duty, nothing will do it.

But even *this* is not sufficient. It was for this reason, that I desired you to observe *another fault* in children, and which is apt to grow up with them; and that is, *to live without any serious design or end of their actions.*

Whatever becomes of *children,* a *man* is *sure* to be ruined that does so. For how is it possible for a man to please God or perform the duties which Christianity obliges him to, who does not make this *the design of his life?* For *this* will be the fruit of living without a daily concern and aim after happiness: a man will be apt to set his heart upon the world, and the things that are about him; which will lead him insensibly to forget God. (And indeed, when men *will not retain God in their knowledge,* God will give them up to *a mind void of judgment, to work all iniquity with greediness,* to the

SERM. LXXXII.

ruin both of their souls and bodies.) On the other hand, whoever has *the seriousness of a man,* and has most at heart how he may save his soul; such a person will be jealous of every thing which may lead him from God; he will be careful of his ways, will observe all his failings, will avoid all occasions of evil; and, above *all things,* he will be most earnest in his prayers to God to give him the graces that are most necessary to enable him to persevere in the ways of holiness unto *his life's end.*

For there is another *evil habit* which we learn when we are young, and which we very hardly forsake when we should be wiser; and that is, *an unconstant temper.*

There are few people who have not at some times *very serious thoughts.* God will shew men to *themselves,* and make them *thoughtful,* whether they *will* or *not.* But then here is our *fault:* we grow weary of ourselves, and strive to divert our minds from thinking of our own misery, till at last we forget that we *are* miserable, or in any danger.

If, in some of these *serious moods,* we make vows of better obedience, we are apt to *forget* them, and all our good purposes come to nothing; and, what is seriously to be lamented, there are very many who have gone into eternity without coming to any *lasting* resolution of serving God, though they had attempted it all their life long, going forwards and backwards till *the night came, when there was no more time to work.* [John 9. 4.]

Our Lord has given us sufficient warning of the mischief that will follow, if, after we have been called to repentance, and have obeyed the voice of God, we again grow careless, and return to our sins. He tells us for instance, that "the evil spirit returns with seven other spirits worse than himself; so that the last state of such a man is worse than the first." It is this which makes *fear* and *watchfulness* so necessary Christian duties; since, if a man is not always upon his guard, the evil spirit will get admittance, and then you see what dreadful work he makes. [Luke 11. 26.]

After all; people may be convinced, and ashamed of their *weaknesses* and *inconstancy,* and lament, to no purpose, that they are too like children, when they should be men in understanding, and have their senses exercised to know *good* and *evil.* The way to prevent these mischiefs would be,

First; for parents to give their children a *Christian education,* according to their power.

Here is the beginning of all our future misery. Children are *indulged;* they are suffered to have their own wills, to make their own choices, which are always foolish. This helps to strengthen their corruption, which will make their hearts to ache before ever they can master it. Whereas, if they were brought up *in the fear of God,* which *is the beginning of wisdom;* if they were made sensible betimes, what they were sent into the world for, what they ought most to *fear,* and what to *hope* for, above all earthly blessings; if they were taught the way of God's commandments, and discreetly *corrected* when they should forget their duty; this would preserve their minds from the corruptions of an evil world. Whereas those that are accustomed to evil, and have the seeds of wickedness cherished in their hearts, will meet with the greatest difficulties in overcoming their evil habits.

Now, this being very often the case, there is no way left, but,

Secondly, to fly to God for help, and beg His most gracious assistance to break these *double bonds;* to put His fear into our hearts; to awaken in us a lively sense of our eternal ruin; to draw us by the cords of love, that our *faith,* and *fear,* and *love,* may make us choose the way of God's commandments, and keep us stedfast in them, till by perseverance in well-doing, we have made our *calling* and *election sure.*

Let us consider, that we are now *no longer children;* that it is now our duty to live like men, who *know,* or *ought* to know, the danger of living in a stupid neglect of eternity.

If children are led by ill examples to think of nothing but their present satisfaction, it is because they are no better taught, and know no better; but this will not excuse them when they come to be *men.* It will not then be enough to say, I do as the rest of the world does. This will not satisfy an awakened conscience, which will tell us, that God has expressly commanded us *not to be conformed to this present evil world.*

To conclude: all Christians agree in this, that *some* time in our lives we *must* resolve in good earnest *to put away*

SERM. LXXXII.

childish things, and to live like *men* who have their senses about them. Amongst these, very many put off their conversion so long till death overtakes them unawares. Some contract such evil habits, as makes them plainly despair of ever overcoming them. Others live in a way of *repenting* and *sinning* all the days of their life.

To prevent all these mischiefs as much as may be, the Church has appointed *a time* when *all people* shall be *called upon* to *consider,* to *resolve,* and to *promise,* to live as becomes men, as becomes Christians, as becomes those that hope for salvation. The *time* the Church has appointed is, when children are come to *years of discretion.*

And this she has done for *a very good reason;* namely, that people may, with their own choice and consent, dedicate themselves to God, *before sin and hell have got the dominion over them,*—before evil habits are become a *second nature.*

And a sad account are those parents like to make, who neglect such a time of preparing their children to receive the grace of God, *then* offered them after so *seasonable* and *solemn* a manner. They do not consider, that the wisest of men, without the grace of God, are too weak for so great a work as all Christians are to go through.

What then do they think will become of their children, whom they abandon to the malice of the devil, who, like a roaring lion, walketh about seeking whom he may (be permitted to) devour, finding them out of God's ways and protection.

[1 Pet. 5. 8.]

Let all others put their trust in God, whose grace is sufficient to enable us to do whatever He expects from us. This He has shewn in the conversion of others whom He has effectually called from an evil life to a life of true religion, in spite of all their enemies, and the great corruption of their nature.

God grant that we may never resist His grace, nor grieve His Holy Spirit, by which we are sanctified. To Whom, &c.

SERMON LXXXIII.

PREACHED AT A CONFIRMATION.

THE KNOWLEDGE NECESSARY FOR EVERY ONE WHO TAKES UPON HIMSELF THE PROFESSION OF A CHRISTIAN, POINTED OUT AND ILLUSTRATED.

LUKE xiv. 28—30.

For which of you intending to build a tower, sitteth not down first, and counteth the cost, whether he have sufficient to finish it? Lest haply after he hath laid the foundation, and is not able to finish it, all that behold it begin to mock him, saying, This man began to build, and was not able to finish.

OUR blessed Saviour well foresaw, that when the Gospel came to be preached to the world, when men were told that their becoming members of the Church of Christ gave them a title to the protection and love of God, a right to heaven and eternal happiness, many would desire to become Christians.

Now, that they might not be deceived in their hopes; that they might not undertake a profession in hopes of being great gainers by it, and afterwards forsake it because of the difficulties they might probably meet with; He makes use of this parable, to make men sensible how wisely they go about their worldly concerns. That they may not be discouraged or disappointed, they sit down, and consider with themselves, they consult with others wiser than themselves, they think what difficulties they shall meet with, what it will cost them, to compass their ends. From whence He would have us make this conclusion; that for the very same reason, when people desire to become Christians in hopes of salva-

SERM. LXXXIII.

tion, they ought in the first place to know what will be expected from them, and whether they will resolve to do what *is* expected from them.

If a man has a house to build; before he lays one stone, he considers what the charge may be, whether he is able, and whether he is resolved, to lay out so much upon it. And he that would be a disciple of Christ, if he does not resolve beforehand to do what Christ expects from His faithful servants, will not only become a scandal to his profession, but will certainly come short of what he hopes for by being a Christian.

Therefore, to carry on the design of this parable: as a man, who is about to undertake any work of moment, would be glad to be informed what difficulties he is likely to meet with, what will be necessary to bring his work to perfection, how much he will be a loser if he miscarries; it is as necessary that every person, who takes upon himself the profession of a Christian, should beforehand know,

First; what God will expect from him.

Secondly; what discouragements he will certainly meet with.

Thirdly; what assistances he may depend upon.

Lastly; what means he must use to gain the end of his faith, which is, the salvation of his soul.

And these are the particulars which, by the good grace of God, I now purpose to explain to you.

I. And, in the first place, every person who desires to be a Christian, that he may live and die in the favour of God, will desire to know *what he must do to please God.*

We all know, that *we must renounce the devil and all his works, the pomps and vanities of this wicked world, and all the sinful lusts of the flesh; that we must believe in God, and keep His commandments.*

But it is not enough to know, and to say this, unless you resolve to live like people that really believe this to be their duty and their interest. Whoever hopes to go to heaven when he dies, must be in earnest while he lives to fit himself for it.

This is signified in the text, *by sitting down and counting the cost;* intimating thus much, that if I think I ought to be

a Christian, I ought likewise seriously, and often, to think what it is to be one; I ought often to consider the promises which God hath made to such as fear and serve Him to the best of their power, that my heart being full of the sense of my own unworthiness, and God's goodness, I may very cheerfully and thankfully do whatever I shall at any time be convinced will please Him.

Now, he that is thus disposed, and resolved that for the sake of heaven, which he hopes for, and for the love of God who has provided such good things for them that serve Him; he that is resolved at all times, for these reasons, to do what he shall be persuaded will please God, is in a fair way to happiness, let his understanding be never so mean.

And this I affirm to you, and this I will shew you from God's Word, that none of you may think, either that want of learning will excuse you from keeping the commandments of God, or hinder you from attaining the promises He has made His children and servants. "If any man (saith Christ) will do His will," that is, really desires to please God, "he shall know of the doctrine whether it be of God, or whether I speak of myself:" that is, the Spirit of God is always ready to enlighten the minds, and to inform the judgments of those that seriously desire to please Him. Thus it was with St. Paul before his conversion: he was verily persuaded, that he did God good service in persecuting the Church; and God was pleased, even by a miracle, to inform him better of his duty. John 7. 17.

And I rather insist upon this, than burden your memories with too many things at once. Reason thus with yourselves: Is it not a great mercy that God will be pleased to pardon me, for Christ's sake, though I have many ways offended Him? Is it not a great favour that God has resolved (if it is not mine own fault) to make such a poor creature as I am equal to the angels of heaven? Is not that God greatly to be feared, who, when I am dead, can raise me to life again, and reward or punish me for ever? Are not the joys of heaven very great, when Jesus Christ who knew them, and so many wise and good men in hopes of them, have suffered death, to encourage others to set their hearts upon them? And must not the torments of hell be terrible

SERM. LXXXIII.

indeed, when nothing on earth, but fire and brimstone burning for ever, can represent them to our understandings?

Sit down, I say, and lay these things together, and think of them often, and you will at last conclude, that God is indeed worthy of your love, and all the poor service you can do Him; that God is greatly to be feared, and especially of such as live to displease Him; that none ought to despair of mercy, but such as are careless, and despise the means of grace; that the miseries of such as are sent into hell are enough to awaken and startle the most careless on earth, if they will but think of them; and that to be blessed with the happiness and company of saints and angels, is what will make us great amends for any trouble we shall be at in our way to heaven.

And the conclusion of this way of reasoning will be: you will heartily desire to know the will of God, and what will please Him; you will at all times be disposed to do His will whenever you shall know it; whenever you are under any doubt concerning the will of God, you will go to those to whom God has committed the care of your soul; you will hearken to them as to men appointed by God to make His will known to you; and if you are not sure that God has declared the contrary to what they tell you, you will obey them that have the rule over you: for this is the command of God. And being thus honestly disposed to do your duty, you shall never want means of knowing it, or what you do shall never be laid to your charge.

After all, you must not expect that the way to heaven and happiness is smooth and easy, and that you will meet with no trouble in getting thither. Jesus Christ has told you otherwise: *We must, through much tribulation, enter into the kingdom of heaven.* Agreeably to this, the Scriptures speak of suffering for the sake of Christ, *of taking up the cross,* as He did before us, *of denying one's-self, enduring afflictions, suffering wrongfully.*

[Acts 14. 22; Matt. 16. 24; 2 Tim. 4. 5; 1 Pet. 2. 19.]

II. Now, you must not imagine, that these Scriptures do not belong to you, for in truth they do. It is as true now, as it was in the very beginning of the Gospel: *every one that will live godly in Christ Jesus must suffer persecution.* This is what you must expect, and it is fit you should know it be-

[2 Tim. 3. 12.]

forehand, that you may resolve to overcome every difficulty rather than come short of heaven. And this was the *second particular* that I proposed to explain to you.

When you became a member of the Church of Christ, you promised "to renounce the devil and all his works, the pomps and vanities of this wicked world, and all the sinful lusts of the flesh." From that, to your dying day, the devil, the world, and the flesh, are your declared enemies, and you must expect to find trouble in resisting them.

I will give you some instances, that you may consider how you will behave yourselves; whether you will give up your hopes of heaven, or whether you will manfully fight under the banner of Christ, against sin, the world, and the devil? They are the express words of Christ: "Whoever will not deny himself, cannot be my disciple." [Luke 14. 27.]

Now, pray consider; will you deny yourselves such things for which you have a passionate desire, if you are sure that they are displeasing to God? For example:

First; it is probable that some time in your lives, you may come to be pleased with such company as will corrupt you by their ill examples, if you continue to like them. Are you beforehand resolved to forsake the conversation of such persons, because you know such self-denial will be well-pleasing to God?

Secondly; it is very probable, that you will meet with abuses in the world. Some will wrong you without reason, and some will think they have reason to vex and torment you. Now, in all such cases, your corrupt nature will put you upon revenge, as the sweetest recompence you can have; and the devil will tempt you to it undoubtedly. What will you do in this case? If you return railing for railing, and one injury for another, you will indeed please the devil and your own wicked heart; but then you go contrary to the command of God, and most certainly displease Him.

For the children of God must forgive their enemies, bless those that curse them, do good to those that hate them, and pray for those that despitefully use them and persecute them. [Matt. 5. 44.]

It is true, this will go much against the grain, and it will require pains to overcome your desires of revenge. You must strive, you must pray, and all little enough to master

SERM. LXXXIII.

this temptation; and it is your wisdom beforehand to resolve what you will do in case of such trials, which, if you live, will most surely befall you.

Thirdly; what if a good bargain should come in your way, will you quit it, if you find that your neighbour will be a sufferer by it; that you cannot have it without oppression, or injustice, or fraud? Will you, in obedience to the law of God, which commands that no man go beyond or defraud his brother in any matter, will you lose an opportunity of enriching yourself, rather than provoke God, who is the avenger of all such ill dealing? It is fit you should think of this, and resolve what you will do; for this is what may happen in the course of your lives.

Fourthly; if you shall happen to wrong any person in body, goods, or good name, you know what God expects from *His* servants; that they acknowledge their fault, ask pardon for it, make what amends they can for the injury done, and resolve to do it no more. Without this, however we come off in this world, God will not pardon us in the next, if we wilfully refuse this.

Now, you see how harsh this is to flesh and blood, since the very severity of the law must be used to bring people to ask forgiveness of those they have wronged. And there are so few that make restitution for the injuries they have done their neighbour, that if one were to judge by that, one would conclude that there is no such thing as injustice in the world. So very hardly are people brought to take shame to themselves, or own they have done wickedly.

Now, it concerns you to consider this, and see whether you can resolve to submit to the way which God has prescribed His faithful servants to walk in; whether you will humble yourselves so far as to ask pardon of any you shall have justly offended; whether you will restore what you have taken by fraud, or craft, or violence. If you cannot resolve to do so, if ever you should be so unhappy as to fall into such sins, it will be to no purpose for you to profess yourselves Christians, for that name will not save you in that day when God will render to every man according to his works done in the body, whether they have been good or evil.

The Apostle St. Paul positively tells us, that "whom the Lord loveth He chasteneth, and scourgeth every son whom He receiveth." You see what you must expect, if you resolve to become children of God. He will try your obedience, whether you will love, honour, and trust in Him, as well when He frowns as when He smiles upon you? Well then, pray consider, how you will behave yourselves, when God shall visit you by pains or sickness of body, by loss of goods, by loss of children or friends, by suffering wicked people to oppress, to backbite, to slander, to reproach you. Heb. 12. 6.

I must tell you beforehand, that you will be apt to repine and be angry that God suffers such evils to befall you. And the devil will be very busy to tempt you to think that you are very hardly dealt with.

On the other hand, God has assured us, that these are very often the effects of His love, and always so to His children. That they are designed either to punish us for what is past, that suffering in this world, we may escape the judgments of God in another life; or they are to wean us from being too fond of a world which we must very soon part from; or lastly, they are to cure us of some vices to which we are too much inclined. But let what will be the reason of our sufferings, this we may be sure of, that they are by the appointment of God or by His permission, and for our good, if we please.

Now, it is your wisdom to consider, what you will do when God visits you? If you can piously resolve with JESUS CHRIST, to say, "Not my will, but Thine be done;" with St. Paul, "The will of the Lord be done;" or with good old Eli, "It is the Lord, let Him do what seemeth Him good;" then are you well prepared to be a Christian indeed. But if you cannot yet think of submitting your will to the will of God, I would by no means have you profess yourself a Christian. [Luke 22. 42; Acts 21. 14; 1 Sam. 3. 18.]

"The works of the flesh" (the Scripture tells us) "are manifest:" that is, they are easily perceived to be contrary to God's will; "such are these, adultery, fornication, uncleanness, lasciviousness, idolatry, witchcraft, hatred, variance, emulations, wrath, strife, seditions, heresies, envyings, murders, drunkenness, revellings, and such like: of the which I tell you before, as I have also told you in time Gal. 5. 19, &c.

SERM. LXXXIII. past," saith the Apostle, "that they which do such things shall not inherit the kingdom of God."

I need not tell you, that you are by nature liable to every abomination here mentioned, any one of which is enough to keep you out of heaven, if you live and die in it unrepented of. I need not tell you that you will be tempted to most of these sins; for you have an enemy within you, which will be always soliciting you to please its desires. But this I must tell you, that if you hope to escape, you must now resolve what to do, that when you are tempted you may be able to bear up against it.

You must resolve then to avoid all temptations to these sins as much as may be; and where you cannot avoid the temptation, you must resolve to overcome it, by calling upon God for help, and using such means, as your spiritual guide shall direct you to. You must resolve upon this now; or else it is to no purpose to say that you purpose to lead a Christian life.

And if through carelessness, presumption, violent temptations, or the like, you happen to fall into any of these sins before named, you must resolve, by God's grace, immediately to repent and forsake it, lest you grow hardened, and careless of your soul, and drive the Spirit of God from you; for then you can never repent, never be forgiven.

Lastly; if it shall please God to give you a sense of your miscarriages, and your sins have been such as have given an offence to the Church of God; do you resolve to give glory to God in a free confession of your sins, and after such a way as the Church and ministers of Christ's kingdom here on earth shall appoint?

It is necessary that you should consider this, and be resolved what you will do in such a case; for as on the one hand shame will be apt to make you endeavour to avoid such an open acknowledgment; (the unthinking world may be apt to persuade you that such a formality is not necessary, and the profane world will be apt to laugh at you;) so on the other hand, you must know, that whoever despiseth the wholesome orders of the ministers of Christ, despiseth Christ Himself, and God that sent Him.

Here then will be the trial of your obedience, and you

ought to resolve beforehand, whether shame, the censure of a foolish world, or any other consideration, shall hinder you from doing that, without which your pardon, in all probability, will never be sealed in heaven.

To conclude this particular. If you can resolve in all these cases to do what you believe will be most pleasing to God, in hopes of being beloved and rewarded by Him, then may you with safety and good hopes renew your baptismal vow, now and at all times. And the grace of God will most surely be with you, to assist and bless your good endeavours, without which your best purposes and most sober resolutions would all be in vain.

III. Which brings us to the *third particular* to be explained; namely, *what assistances you may depend on, to enable you to do what you piously resolve upon.* And this is very necessary to be considered; for the Word of God assures us, and by experience we find, that all our good purposes and designs will come to nothing, unless the Spirit of God be with us, to encourage, to support, and to strengthen us.

And for this very reason, the apostles of Christ (no doubt by His appointment) began this usage in the Church of God, that after persons had by baptism been received into the Church and household of faith, and had been made partakers of the covenant of grace, the apostles, and their successors, should lay their hands upon them, assuring them, by that sign of God's favour and good-will towards them, that such a measure of His Holy Spirit shall accompany them, as shall be sufficient to guide, to support, and to defend them, from themselves and their own deceitful hearts, from the world and all its vain, deceitful charms, from the devil, and all the powers of darkness, till they come to that everlasting kingdom of which they are heirs.

Now, if this be the way by which God will bestow a greater measure of His Holy Spirit, what sober person will neglect such means of grace? Who will dare to despise this ordinance?

But, as beneficial as this ordinance may be to all those that make use of it, it will secure no man in the ways of holiness, but such as purpose to use their best endeavours to

SERM. LXXXIII.

retain that Holy Spirit which is conferred upon them by imposition of hands. We pray, that God may defend you with His heavenly grace. We shew you that God is ever ready to bless His own holy appointments. We may convince you that this is one of His ordinances, and as such you may earnestly desire to be partakers of it; and yet, after all, reap no benefit by it.

For you may neglect the gift bestowed upon you, forget your promises and holy purposes, and grieve the Holy Spirit of God, by which you are sealed unto the day of redemption.

God forbid it should be so with any of you on whom I am now going to lay my hands. But since it may be so, it is fit you should have warning to be careful of your ways, and know how to value the grace of God so as not to forfeit it.

And value it surely you will, if you consider the blessing of being under the government of the Spirit of God: for then no temptation can overcome you; the devil cannot hurt you; for greater is He that is with you, than he that is against you. You will, by His assistance, learn to despise this world, and set your affections upon a much better. You will be enabled, by that same Spirit, to mortify the deeds of the flesh, that you may live—live as free from sin as may be here, and for ever in heaven. For this good Spirit will enlighten your mind with saving truths; when you go astray, will pull you back; when you grow careless, will awaken you; when you want help, will assist you; when you want comfort, will rejoice your heart; when you do well, will encourage you; and when you do amiss, will correct and chasten you; until He brings you to heaven, when all your trouble and your danger will be over, and, for the short trials you have undergone in this life, you will be made happy for ever and ever.

IV. And now you will desire to know, *by what means this good Spirit is to be secured, how you may attain the end of your faith and Christian profession;* namely, *the salvation of your souls;* which was the last particular we proposed to speak to.

[Ps. 16. 8; 119. 60.]

The holy Psalmist set himself (as he tells us) this rule: "I set God always before me, therefore I shall not fall." That is, he endeavoured to have these thoughts ever in his

mind: that God saw all his actions, heard all his words, and knew the very thoughts of his heart; that therefore he might not offend God, he took care of his thoughts, words, and actions. But if at any time he had the misfortune to fall, his way was not to continue in rebellion: "I made haste," saith he, "and delayed not to keep Thy commandments."

And thus must you do, if you hope for the continuance of God's grace.

You must strive to live in the fear of God, remembering His judgments upon wilful sinners, frequently calling to mind the vows that are upon you, calling upon Him in all your wants, and giving Him thanks for every blessing you receive.

By this means, the knowledge of God will be ever present with you, and the Spirit of God will delight in you, and lead you in the way wherein you should go. And if at any time you go astray, He will by the methods of His providence bring you back, that you may in the end be saved.

In the second place, be sure not to neglect any opportunities of improving yourselves in Christian knowledge and the grace of God; remembering, that to profane the Lord's day, to neglect the holy Sacrament, to despise the advice and admonitions of your spiritual guides, is to despise the Lord; and I need not tell you what they are to expect that do so.

Be sure to let no day pass without begging God's pardon and blessing; for to neglect this duty, is a sure way to lead you into an indifference for God and goodness. What is the reason that you respect your parents? Is it not because you frequently receive good from them? And do you hope to keep a love for God in your hearts, unless you constantly pray to Him, and constantly give Him thanks for His favours; ever remembering, that it is as impossible to live a good life without God's grace and assistance, as it is to live without food?

And pray believe me, in a matter which very nearly concerns you, when I do assure you, it is much easier now to begin to live a Christian life, than it will be hereafter. *Remember thy Creator in the days of thy youth*, before evil company have corrupted you, before evil habits have got domi- [Eccles. 12. 1.]

SERM. LXXXIII.

nion over you, before the love of the world has got possession of your hearts; for then it will be hard indeed to turn to the Lord with all your heart, when sin and hell have got the dominion over you.

In one word; as you hope to be saved, (and who is there that does not?) consider what you are doing: that you are going to dedicate yourselves to God, with the full consent of your own wills; and that you have only this choice for the future, either you must be God's servants, doing His will, and serving Him faithfully all the days of your lives; or the devil will take you into his service, and you are undone for ever.

But may God bless, protect, and govern you all your days; may He possess your hearts with such a lively sense of His great mercy in bringing you from the power of Satan unto God, in giving you an early right to His holy covenant, and an early knowledge of your duty, that you may honestly devote yourselves to His service, that you may receive the fulness of His grace, and be able to withstand the temptations of the world, the flesh, and the devil.

And as He has made you His children by adoption, may He bring you in His good time to His everlasting kingdom, for Jesus Christ's sake.

To Whom, with the Father and the Holy Ghost, be all honour, glory, thanksgiving, and praise, now and for ever. Amen.

SERMON LXXXIV.

PREACHED AT A CONFIRMATION.

THE INSTRUCTION OF CHILDREN IN THE KNOWLEDGE AND FEAR OF GOD ONE GREAT PART OF THE DUTY OF PARENTS.

DEUT. vi. 6, 7.

These words which I command thee this day shall be in thine heart; and thou shalt teach them diligently unto thy children. See Prov. 22. 6.

THAT is, as ever you value your own or your children's happiness, you must endeavour to fix and preserve in their hearts, the *knowledge*, the *fear*, and the *love* of God, what He has *commanded*, and what He hath *forbidden*; for, without this, they will be unhappy in this world, and in the next undone for ever.

To fear God, and to keep His commands, is the whole duty and happiness of man. Forasmuch as God has declared, and determined, that He will bring every work into judgment, and every secret thing, whether it be good, or whether it be evil. And they that have done good, who have led good lives, shall go into life everlasting; and they that have done evil, who have led idle and wicked lives, and have not repented, and brought forth fruits meet for repentance, shall go into everlasting fire. Eccl. 12. 13.

Certainly, parents do not consider this so well as they should do, or they would not suffer their children to grow *wild*, and *wicked*, and *ignorant* of God, and of their duty, as too many of them do.

Parents are obliged, both by nature and grace, to take care of their own children; to instruct, to restrain, and to correct them. And they that do not do so, do, by a just

SERM. LXXXIV.

judgment of God, bring upon themselves sorrow, and upon their country a curse, by breeding up so many children of Satan to corrupt their neighbours.

Parents are very often the greatest enemies that their children have. Some leave them riches, not always honestly gotten; and these become a curse to their children, and not a blessing.

Others strive all their life long to leave their children a great deal, which too often becomes a snare and a temptation; makes their children forget their dependence upon God, and the duty they owe their Maker.

Many, very many parents are so blind, that they cannot, or so perverse that they will not, see their children's faults, nor correct them. Such parents very often live to see their children, to their sorrow, disobedient, stubborn, self-willed, neither minding their commands, nor their advice.

There are parents so little concerned for their children's welfare, that they let them have their own will and ways. They see their children keep idle and wicked company; they see them given to lying, to swearing, to the taking of God's name to idle and wicked purposes, to the profaning of the Lord's day; and often without rebuking them, seldom chastising them, though they are in the ready way to destruction.

Lastly; too many parents deprive their children of a comfortable subsistence, many by drinking away their estates, others by idleness, prodigality, litigiousness, and many such extravagant ways, by which their children are exposed to hardships and misery, and are tempted to take unlawful ways to get their bread. This is a crime so barbarous, so cruel, so unnatural, that a thief, in comparison of such a parent, is a better man.

One might insist much more upon the faults of too many parents, by which they leave a miserable or a wicked posterity behind them, for which they must answer in another world. But this is not what the subject we are upon leads us to, for this is, *To shew what parents ought to do,—what is in their power to do, in order to make themselves and their children happy in this and in a better world.* "These words which I command thee this day shall be in thine heart; and

thou shalt teach them diligently unto thy children;" that is, you shall take all occasions of instructing your children in the knowledge and fear of God.

God Himself compares His love for such as fear Him to the love of parents for their children. "As a father pitieth his own children, so the Lord pitieth them that fear Him." Ps. 103. 13.

Let us consider how parents should shew their love and pity for their children.

The first and most necessary duty of parents is, *to pray for their children.* Parents should know, and they should consider, that their children have from them a nature corrupt, and prone to evil; and that if they are not hindered by the grace or providence of God, they will ruin themselves as sure as they live; and when they die, they will be lost for ever. Wretchedly careless therefore, and wicked, are those parents, who do not carefully beg the blessing of God upon their children, and earnestly pray that God's grace may prevent and follow them all the days of their life.

It was the observation of a very good man, *That the children of many prayers and tears do not often miscarry*[a]. I would to God that every parent that hears it would remember this.

And so we proceed to the next duty of parents; which is, to watch over that corrupt nature of their children, which *is prone to evil continually.* We must be very particular upon this head, as ever we hope to do any great good.

A proneness to the sin of *lying* is one of the first fruits and signs of a corrupt nature. Whether children tell lies in jest, or to excuse their faults, or to abuse those they do not love, they ought to be told over and over again, that it is really the devil that tempts them to lie; for, saith our Lord Christ, "he is a liar, and the father of lies." That it is one of those sins which the Lord hateth in an especial manner. They ought to be put often in mind, that it is an odious and a shameful vice to be caught in a lie, and that it is seldom that one lie is not followed by another to excuse it. Let them know how much better it is, and becoming a good child, to tell the truth, and take blame upon themselves, John 8. 44. Prov. 6. 17.

[a] [An allusion to the reply of a holy bishop to Monnica the mother of Augustine, "Fieri non potest ut filius istarum lacrymarum pereat." S. Aug. Conf., lib. iii. 21. Bibliotheca Patrum Edit. Oxon. 1838. tom. i. p. 44.]

SERM. LXXXIV.

rather than excuse a fault by a lie. Lastly; let your child know for certain, that it is a vice much harder to be left off than they are aware of. If all this will not prevent or cure a child of this vice, repeated correction ought to be made use of; lest, as the Spirit of God assures us, he have his portion with liars, in the lake that burneth with fire and brimstone.

[Rev. 21. 8.]

There is another evil which children, through bad examples, and the temptation of the devil, are very prone to; and that is, *taking God's name in vain;* making use of the name of the great God on every foolish and idle occasion. Parents should be very careful to admonish and to correct their children betimes, to prevent them from falling into this sin, which is so offensive to God, that He has threatened to punish it in a most especial manner.

And indeed it very naturally leads to many more damnable sins, to *cursing,* to *swearing,* and even to *perjury.* They that are prone to lie, and to swear in common conversation, will be strongly tempted to forswear themselves, when a great temptation comes in their way; they having grieved the good Spirit of God, and an evil spirit having taken possession of them. That it really is so, is plain from a man's being tempted to a crime of so high a nature, that it is, in effect, *the denying of* God.

Too many, I am afraid, are ignorant of the greatness of this sin; otherwise no Christian would be guilty of *perjury,* either to gain the whole world, or to escape the greatest punishment that man can suffer.

For every man that perjures himself saith in effect, 'I do not fear what God can do unto me.' A man that takes an oath calls upon God to be a witness of what he is going to swear to. If he swears to what he knows to be false, he cannot put a greater contempt upon God: as if God did not know what men do and swear, or that He could not punish the affront.

So help me God! is an expression which should never be lightly repeated, either by such as administer an oath, or by those that take an oath; forasmuch as every man who repeats these words to countenance an untruth, renounces the help of God, and this not only for himself, but even for

his family. "A curse," (saith God, Zech. v. 4,) "A curse shall enter into the house of every one that sweareth falsely by My name, and shall consume it."

You see what reason all parents have not to suffer their children to make use of the name of God to any idle or wicked purposes, this being the ready way to perjury when they come to be men, having in their youth lost the fear of God, and a reverence for His name.

Profaning the Lord's Day is another great sin, which children are but too apt, if not timely restrained, to run into. They have, when young, little or no knowledge of the necessity of God's grace, or mercy, or help, or blessing; and therefore are not much concerned to go to Church to ask these favours.

This indifference, if not corrected, will grow up with them, and they will live and die in a careless neglect of the ordinances of God. Parents therefore should let their children know betimes, that they are by nature sinners, and prone to evil; that without the grace of God they will be undone for ever; that as ever they hope for God's pardon, and grace, and blessing, they must pray for them; that God has appointed one day in seven, to the end, that men, laying aside all worldly business and care for the body, may take care of their souls, and honour their Creator and Redeemer, by going to His house, and there begging His pardon, and giving Him thanks for His mercies.

In one word; your children ought to be told over and over again, that they need not be at pains to go to hell; that they will go thither of course, if they will not go to Church, and there learn how to escape damnation.

They should be put in mind also, that the neglect of the public worship of God is the beginning of every wickedness. That even criminals at the gallows generally confess this, that the *breach of the Sabbath*, and the neglect of the public worship, was the beginning of those sins which brought them to an untimely end.

Keeping of idle and loose company has been the ruin of an infinite number of young people. Parents complain too late of the ill ways their children take, when they have suffered them, without reproof, and without correction, to

SERM. LXXXIV.

follow their own ways in the choice of the company they keep.

How many wicked oaths, curses, and other blasphemous expressions, must children hear and learn, when they are suffered to keep wicked company! How often will they hear the name of God taken in vain! How often will they hear sin, and hell, and damnation, made a mock of, even till they learn to do it themselves! And then it is a miracle if they are not lost for ever.

Parents therefore should often put their children in mind, that the devil is in all wicked companies, and especially where God, or any thing that belongs to God, is dishonoured or profaned.

And lastly, they should be often put in mind, how hard it will be to leave off most of those sins which they have been accustomed to hear, and take delight in.

Pride *is a vice easily seen and hated in grown people;* but it is not considered, that the seeds of pride are sown in youth. If parents will suffer their children to have their own wills in almost every thing; if they will deny them nothing they have a mind to; if they will be pleased even with their faults and failings; they must expect, that when they are grown up, they will overvalue themselves, and despise others; not suffer themselves to be contradicted right or wrong; they will be headstrong, self-willed, not to be persuaded; they will not see their own faults, but even defend them; they will not be beholden to any body for advice; their parents' counsel shall be set little by, and the instruction and reproof of the very ministers of God shall be despised. These and many others are the instances of pride begun in youth, for want of parents teaching their children to be humble, modest, and obedient.

There is another instance of pride both pernicious and common, *the making children in love with finery.* Parents do not always see the evil effects of this. They will see it to their sorrow, when their children are grown up, and put them to expenses beyond their ability or condition; when they are tempted to take unlawful ways to be finer than they ought to be; and when by this they give occasion to men of lewd lives to make attempts upon their chastity.

Parents should rather take all occasions to instil into their children this most certain truth: that nobody ever was, or will be respected the more for being finer than their state or condition of life requires, but rather become the scorn and contempt of others.

To proceed: If parents would but take a little more pains to give their children a great abhorrence of the most shameful vice of *pilfering* and *stealing*, we should not have so many complaints of people when they are grown up being given to the scandalous sin of defrauding their masters or parents of their goods.

Children should be seriously and often warned against setting their hearts upon what is not their own, and that it will never prosper with them; and that they will be tempted from small sins of this kind to greater, which has at last brought many a man and woman to the gallows, (by a just judgment of God,) who little thought of coming to such an untimely end.

The seeds of INTEMPERANCE, of GLUTTONY, and DRUNKENNESS, are very often sown in youth, and grow up with their years. And a sad account parents will have to give, who indulge their children in any of these vices.

In the first place, they lay a sure foundation for future miseries; for sickness, very often for poverty, for the ruin of their families, for untimely death, and too too often for death eternal.

Parents, instead of indulging their children in any thing that leads to any of these vices, should endeavour all they can to make them sensible, that by giving way to their appetites they are making themselves bonds which cannot easily be broken; that it will cost them dear to leave off the love of *drink*, of eating to intemperance, of being fond of dainties. They should therefore use them betimes to a sober way of living; to deny their appetites; to lay a prudent restraint upon them before custom is become a second nature. Their children should be often put in mind, that meat and drink are the gifts of God; that we should never take them without begging His blessing upon them, and giving Him thanks for them; and that the doing of this is the likeliest way to keep us from abusing any of the gifts of God to His dishonour and our own misery.

SERM. LXXXIV.

YOUTHFUL LUSTS *are very naturally and too often the fruits of intemperance.* "Whoredom and wine" (saith the Spirit) "take away the heart;" that is, all fear of God, all care for the soul, all concern for what must come hereafter. In short, the sins of impurity and uncleanness will in time root out all good principles, make men forget their most solemn resolutions, and grieve that Holy Spirit by which we are sealed unto the day of redemption.

Hosea 4. 11.

And yet these are crimes too often laughed at, made a jest of, and committed, without fear of the judgment and vengeance of God, with which He has threatened such sinners, to make them have their portion with devils, and everlasting fire.

What pains, therefore, ought parents to take to save their children from falling into these sins, and the punishment which certainly attends them? How often should they repeat to them the lesson which saved Joseph from being ruined by this sin: "How can I do this great wickedness, and sin against God?" How often should they put them in mind of the truth set down by the wisest of men: "The house of the whore is the way to hell."

[Gen. 39. 9.]

Prov. 7. 27.

How careful should they be to warn them against keeping immodest, unchaste, and loose company; against hearing filthy talk, lewd songs, wanton discourses, which corrupt the heart before people areaware of the mischief!

How often should young maids be told, that when they lose their modesty, they lose a great grace of God, and a great guard and security against all manner of wickedness!

How often should young men be put in mind of this great truth, that to corrupt and debauch others is to make themselves liable to a double damnation!

In one word; parents who have any love or regard either for themselves, or their children's welfare, reputation, or happiness in this world, or the world to come, will be very careful to watch over their children's conduct with regard to the sins of impurity and uncleanness, which will as surely shut them out of heaven, as that God is there.

We shall only mention one other evil, which children are prone to continually; and this is, TO IDLENESS, which will be attended with infinite mischiefs, if not prevented by good instruction, and wholesome discipline.

There is a state of life to which every man is called; and he that fancies that he has nothing to do, no work to answer for, the devil will find that man work enough.

Children, therefore, should not be suffered to get a slothful habit of squandering away their time in doing nothing, or that which is worse than nothing. "Cast ye the unprofitable servant into outer darkness; there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth," is a truth, which, if often repeated, would, one would hope, cure the most sluggish waster of his time and talents. [Matt. 25. 30.]

Thus far we have considered the duty of parents to teach their children. And parents who neglect this duty will be most inexcusable, because there is not one of these duties but what the most unlearned parent is capable of performing. But the truth is, too many parents are little concerned whether their children are like to go to heaven or hell. They neither teach them, by their advice or example, how to attain the one or escape the other: and if the tender love of God for the salvation of His poor creatures had not made other provision for their safety, they must inevitably have perished.

Now, the provisions which God has made for the salvation of men are *the ordinances of the Gospel,* which are the ordinary means of grace and salvation.

By *baptism,* we are admitted into the congregation of Christ's flock; and by that ordinance we had the Holy Spirit communicated to us, for a principle of a new and spiritual life.

At *confirmation,* you are called upon to consider this more seriously; to consider the sad consequence of grieving that Holy Spirit, of falling into an idle, careless, and wicked course of life.

This is what I will, in few words, set before you,—before you who have been instructed, and know why you come to be confirmed.

You who have put on solemn resolutions of living as becomes the Gospel of Christ; who, being sensible of the weakness and corruption of your nature, do resolve to pray for the continuance and increase of the gifts of God's Holy Spirit, who alone can keep you in the way of salvation; to you I

SERM. LXXXIV.

now apply, beseeching you, as many as understand me, to consider and remember what I now say to you.

Remember, that while you keep the vows which you are going to renew, you will be under the especial protection and guidance of God and His good angels; you will be secured against the great enemy of our souls, who is continually seeking whom he may devour; that is, such as he finds have by their wicked lives taken themselves from under God's especial protection.

On the other hand, if you forget the promises and good purposes you are going to renew before God and this congregation, you will grieve the Spirit of God, and force Him to leave you to your own corrupt nature and choices; and to Satan, who governs all such as are forsaken of God's Spirit.

This you may be sure of, from what you may observe happens every day.

You see people who have been bred and for some time lived like Christians have become afterwards as careless, and as wicked, as if they believed neither God nor religion, neither heaven nor hell.

Let me, therefore, admonish you of those things which force the good Spirit to leave men to themselves. The Rom. 1. 28. Apostle tells us, "that they that will not retain God in their knowledge, God will give them up to a reprobate mind;" that is, to a mind void of judgment.

This is the first step to ruin. God puts into people's hearts good thoughts, good purposes, good resolutions. These they forget, nor will they mind the checks of conscience, which is God's voice speaking to them, till at last He leaves them to take their own ways.

To conclude: do not depend upon this ordinance as a charm, or hope for any benefit by it, without observing the [Heb. 12. 14.] conditions of God's promises and blessing: "Without holiness no man shall see the Lord."

[Gal. 6. 15.] It was the Apostle's own declaration, "Neither circumcision availeth any thing, nor uncircumcision, but a new creature." So be you assured of it, that neither *Christian baptism*, nor *confirmation*, nor any other ordinance of the Gospel, will profit any person without an holy life.

May the good Spirit of God keep this ever in your hearts and minds! May God give you the Spirit of wisdom, to choose what is good; the spirit of understanding, to know your duty; the spirit of counsel, in all your doubts; the spirit of godly strength, to resist temptations to sin; the spirit of holiness, to be conformed to the will of God; the spirit of piety, in all your actions: and fill them, O God, with the Spirit of Thy holy fear, now and evermore, for Jesus Christ His sake.

To Whom, with Thee, and that Holy Spirit, be all honour, glory, and power, now and for ever. Amen.

SERMON LXXXV.

PREACHED AT A CONFIRMATION.

THE FOLLY AND DANGER OF EXPECTING THE BLESSINGS OF CHRISTIANITY WITHOUT LEADING A CHRISTIAN LIFE.

EPHES. iv. 17.

See Rom. 1. 18; 2 Tim. 3. 5; 1 Pet. 4. 3.

This I say therefore, and testify in the Lord, that ye henceforth walk not as other Gentiles walk, in the vanity of their mind; [that is, *following their own wicked inclinations.*]

THERE cannot be too much pains taken to forewarn Christians against satisfying themselves with the bare performance of the outward duties of religion.

It is probable, that there are more people lost, who thought themselves safe, than of such who, knowing that they had no religion, had therefore no hopes of salvation.

A man who goes constantly to Church (for instance) will be apt to think himself in a better condition than one who does so seldom or never. I should be loth to encourage a man to think so of himself, till I see whether his going to Church makes him a better man than the other who stays at home. If it does not, pray what will his going to Church profit him? You will say he is in the way of knowing his duty. Be it so. But to know one's duty, and not to do it, is to be in a worse condition than if one had never had the means of knowing it. For "unto whomsoever much is given, of him shall much be required."

Luke 12. 48.

Now, that this is really the case of the generality of Christians, any body will be satisfied, who does but seriously observe what passes in the world. For example: consider how very careful people are to have their children dedicated to God in *baptism*, and what a great misfortune they would

think it, if they were in a place where they could not have that sacrament duly administered; and yet, generally speaking, there is as little care taken, by these very parents, to have their children taught the meaning of this ordinance, and the obligations it lays their children under, as if it had been a matter of no consequence, whether they had been baptized or not. But you will say, however, they are hereby within the covenant of grace, and that is a great blessing. So it is, provided they understand it, and are taught to keep it. But let me put you in mind, that just thus were Korah, Dathan, and Abiram, within the covenant; and yet they went alive into the pit. So was Judas himself. So were all those who yet have taken the broad way, and are this very moment lamenting their lost condition in another life.

But one would hope better things of such as, with their own mouth and consent (in the presence of God and His Church) do ratify, and confirm, and acknowledge themselves bound to *believe*, and to *do*, all those things which were promised for them in baptism. One would hope better things of these. But, God knows, it is too often otherways. And you shall see too many, who have thus solemnly given themselves up to God, as careless how they live, as if they had never been *baptized*, never been *confirmed*.

Let us, in the next place, consider Christians in one of the most solemn duties of Christianity. If ever Christians are serious, and put on holy purposes of living as becomes their profession, it must sure be when they go to the *Lord's Supper*. But what will you think of Christians who come from the Lord's Table, without *charity*, without purposes of becoming better men, better neighbours, better Christians, for the time to come? You must say, that they do not understand their religion, or that they hope their profession will do them good without a suitable practice.

We see people every day going out of the world, seemingly satisfied with their condition, without having made any Christian preparation for that great change. Could this possibly be, but that Christians hope, that their baptism, and being within the covenant, will save them like a charm, they know not how?

These observations may convince you, that nature is ex-

SERM. LXXXV.

tremely corrupt, that we are blind, and most apt to deceive ourselves in matters of the greatest concern to us, and that Christians ought to be often called upon to consider their profession, and what it obliges them to; and that to think to enjoy the blessings of Christianity, without leading a Christian life, is a very great delusion. "I conjure you," saith the Apostle in the text, "I conjure you by the Lord, that ye henceforth walk not," that is, live not, "as other Gentiles," or as men unconcerned do, "in the vanity of their mind;" that is, following their own corrupt inclinations, and vainly hoping that an outward religion, without an inward sense of God, and a practice suitable to it, will gain His favour, and make them happy when they die.

It is thus that people unconverted live. A Christian is to live after another manner, as he hopes for salvation. A Christian ought to know, that this is not the world he was made for; that by his profession he is not to love the world; that it is impossible for any man to love the world, and be a friend of God. It is true, these are hard sayings to flesh and blood, and it is utterly impossible for any man, without the grace of God, to receive them and live accordingly; for we are in a state of deep corruption.

But then the design of religion is, to deliver us out of this miserable state; to restore us to the favour of God; to obtain His grace to enable us to do what *by nature* we are not able to do; to gain us a title to eternal happiness, which we have no right, no pretence to.

Now, the Christian Religion, where men embrace it sincerely, will do all this for us. If a man *fears God, trembles at His Word,* believes the promises of God made to us when we were baptized; if a man is afraid of offending God, sorry for it when he knows he has done amiss; begs God's pardon, prays for His grace; keeps out of the way of temptation, makes use of the means of grace which God affords him; whoever does this sincerely, may depend upon it, that God will give him a *new heart, new desires, a better understanding, more strength,* a *firmer faith,* and *well-grounded hope;* or, in the words of Scripture, he will become a *new man,* a *new creation.* And then he will see plainly, that religion is as necessary for a man who would save his soul, as meat and

drink are for a man who would preserve his body from death.

But if, instead of doing this, Christians, notwithstanding their promises, will follow the inclinations of their own hearts, which too often lead to sin; why then religion will become a burden to them; they will get into a way and a habit of sinning; and, wanting strength to break the bonds in which sin has laid them fast, they will have nothing left but anguish and despair; they will commit iniquities with greediness, and not see their danger till there are no hopes of a remedy.

I know very well what people are apt to say in their hearts to all this. All this ado cannot be expected from us; we are ignorant; we have too much of other business upon our hands; it is enough if we can do the outward duties of religion; let those that have more *learning* and *time, think,* and *watch,* and *pray,* and keep out of the way of temptations.

This is the language of those who would lead a careless life, and yet expect to be happy. To all which one may give *these short answers:*

Those who say they have no *time* do not, it seems, know what it is that religion requires of them. He is not always the best Christian who spends most time in reading and praying, but he who honestly discharges the duties of his place and calling.

And if a poor man, who is burdened with a family, or encumbered with business, will yet find a minute's time to pray for God's grace and blessing as well as he can, and give God thanks for the favours he receives; if he is content with his condition, and does not attempt to better it by unjust ways; if he teaches his children to fear God, and takes care to correct them when they do what they should not; if he is upright in his dealings, obedient to his governors, peaceable in his conversation, temperate in his way of living, and in charity with his neighbours; why, this man's religion is such as it should be, and here is no great deal of time spent in doing what he ought to do.

So that *want of time* will never be a just excuse for any man for not being as good a Christian as he ought to be. Much less *want of learning.* And yet people are apt to think so. At the same time, if any man should take upon

SERM. LXXXV.

him to preach and to advise men to live at the rate most people do live, he would be looked upon as the worst of men, even by the most ignorant man that should hear him. If a man should tell you, you need not be over exact in your dealings, nor do to others as you would wish to be dealt with yourself; if he should bid you to enjoy the world while you may, and take no thought for what may come hereafter; if he should tell you, that as wise people as you have done so, and have put off their repentance to the last moment of their lives; the most ignorant would soon say, this is no safe doctrine, we understand better than so ourselves. Do you so? Why then, ignorance will be *no cloak for your sin,* neither now, nor at the day of judgment.

But how shall one resist so many temptations that he is sure to meet with? Christianity furnishes you with sufficient means of *avoiding, resisting,* or *overcoming,* all the difficulties you can possibly meet with, *provided you embrace it in good earnest.* God, who has set us in the midst of temptations, and yet requires us not to yield to them, has bound Himself to help us, if we do *our* duty.

But here is the cheat we put upon ourselves. Our inclinations lead us to do something or other which we know God has forbidden us: we do not consider that He has forbidden us such things out of pure love to our souls. We first wish that He had not forbidden us; then we consider all the difficulties we have to struggle with; then we flatter ourselves with the hopes that God, who knows our circumstances, will pardon our transgressions; we consider His *goodness,* but not His *justice,* or else we hope some time or other to repent, and make satisfaction for the fault, and so we commit it without further scruple or reflection.

Whereas a serious Christian, in the first place, keeps out of the way of temptation as much as may be. By that he shews his love to God, whom he would not willingly offend. If he cannot well avoid the temptation, then he soberly resolves not to yield to it; he considers who it is that he shall offend if he should do so; he reflects upon the solemn promises he has made of not doing any thing which God has forbidden him; and, knowing that God is able and ready to help him, he flees to *Him* for succour and grace to with-

stand the temptation, and he is sure to find help in time of need.

But the generality of Christians live without laying these things much to heart,—the more is the pity. But will you go headlong to destruction, because other people are running careless to their ruin? A wise man will not ask, what do others do; but what is it that God would have me do? What does my profession require of me?

When once people find that a Christian is resolved to live so as becomes his character, they will not expect that he should do as the world does, live at all adventures; nay, they will censure him if he does so. This man, they will say, makes profession of Christianity; why does he not live as becomes a Christian?

In short; few people are so hardened as to say *I am resolved to have no religion:* but there are an infinite number of Christians who are content to live like heathens, and yet hope that all will be well with them at the last. What shall one say to make them sensible of their stupidity? Shall we ask them, whether they believe an eternity to come, of endless joys or endless misery? Yes, they will say, they do. What, and yet live as if you neither feared nor believed them? *Seek ye first the kingdom of God and His righteousness,* is one of the very first precepts of that Gospel which you have embraced. And is it no uneasiness to your mind, to know that it is the least thing in your thoughts, the very last in your intention? And will you hope to shelter yourself from the wrath of God, by an outward profession of Christianity? Why, be well assured, that there is no man so far from salvation, as one who is got into the way of doing what good Christians do, without being inwardly converted; who have (as the Apostle speaks) a form of godliness, but denying the power; not suffering Christianity to make them one jot better men. [2 Tim. 3. 5.]

Christians, therefore, should be very careful to avoid falling into a state so dangerous. To prevent which, we should often and betimes consider, how very difficult it is to get rid of evil habits, when once we have suffered them to *take deep root.* A tree, which with one hand may be pulled up this year, the *next* may be grown so big, as all one's force shall

SERM. LXXXV.

not be able to remove it out of its place. And Christians find, *by sad experience,* when once an evil habit of *living without God* has been suffered to get ground, it is no very easy matter to root it up, and master it; and yet it must be mastered, or we are for ever undone. Therefore, where Christians have been so unhappy as to fall into a careless way of living, the very best thing they can do is, *to repent forthwith,* lest the work grow too big to be undertaken, and at last they despair of ever returning to a sober mind.

This thing is set forth in a very lively manner by one of the Fathers, in words to this purpose[a]: "An hermit is carried by an angel into a wood, where he sees an old man cutting down boughs to make up a burden; when it was pretty big, he attempts to carry it away; but finding it very heavy, he lays it down again, cuts more wood, makes the burden greater, and then in vain tries to carry it off. Having done this several times, the hermit in the mean while being astonished at the old man's folly, the angel tells him, this is an exact representation of those Christians, who, being sensible of the burden of their sins, resolve to repent, but soon grow weary, and instead of lessening their burden, they increase it, still resolving to repent, till the burden grows too heavy to be borne, and then in great despair they die in their sins unrepented of."

Now this, God knows, is the case of too many, who, when they should set about the work of repentance, make it every day more difficult, by deferring it.

Those who have dedicated themselves to God betimes, and have not yet fallen into a careless way of living, would do well to consider what bitter work they are preparing for themselves, when they forget the vows which they have made so solemnly.

In short; without the grace of God, no man can live as becomes a Christian. The grace of God can be *secured* only by keeping a strict watch upon ourselves; and *increased,* by making use of what one has already. They that do so may depend upon the favour of God; and they will be sure to escape a great deal of trouble and remorse of conscience in this world, and misery in the next.

I should now conclude; only I suspect that a great many

[a] [Pelag., lib. xviii. n. 2. apud Rosweyd vitt. patr., lib. iii. § 38.]

Christians may think themselves no way concerned in what I have said upon this head. Few think themselves in any danger, who are not profligate sinners. After all; men may be in great hazard of their salvation, who yet are not taken notice of for scandalous livers.

Every man may best judge for himself by such marks as these:

First, *every one who holds the truth in unrighteousness,* that is, all who do not live up to what they know to be most pleasing to God;

Secondly; all who have no concern for their eternal welfare, after God has made known to us, by His Son, the rewards and punishments of another life;

Thirdly; all who have their hearts so much taken up with the world, that they cannot apply themselves seriously to the care of their souls;

Fourthly; all who, though they pretend to serve God, yet do it with that indifferency, that God is rather dishonoured than glorified by their service; who give scandal by their irreverence, and behave themselves before their Maker as if He were an idol, who neither *heard* nor *saw* the devotions of his worshippers;

In short; all who live in a general neglect of their duty, though they are not guilty of such gross sins as make them scandalous: all these, I say, may be assured of it, that they live under God's displeasure; and their hope of salvation is nothing but a delusion.

And God grant that all who are concerned may think of it, while it is in their power, by the help of God, to prevent the evil consequences of living without any true religion.

On the other hand; all such as are convinced, that the design of Christianity is, to make men holy, that they may be happy; that Jesus Christ came indeed to *redeem us from the wrath to come,* but that He must first redeem us from *our vain conversation.* Such as know, and in good earnest believe this, and are disposed to let Christianity have this effect upon them, *to turn them from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan unto God;* such as are resolved, by the grace of God, *that the time past of their lives shall suffice to have wrought the will of the Gentiles,* that they will no longer *hold*

[1 Thess. 1. 10; 1 Pet. 1. 18; Acts 26. 18; 1 Pet. 4. 3; Rom. 1. 18.]

SERM. LXXXV.

the truth in unrighteousness, but will let Christianity have its effect upon their lives, as well as upon their faith; such as know their own frailty, and come to God for help, and use the means of grace which He has appointed for our recovery and salvation, and find the effects of God's grace in the change that is wrought in them for the better: all such have the comfort of knowing, that their religion is what it should be; that they have not only *the form* of godliness, but *the power* thereof; and that their portion in the world to come shall be much better than if they had continued to have walked (that is, lived) as other Gentiles, or as men unconverted do, in the vanity of their minds, that is, following their own corrupt inclinations.

From which vanity, and the evil that attends it, the good Lord deliver us all, for Jesus Christ's sake. To Whom, &c.

SERMON LXXXVI.

PREACHED AT A CONFIRMATION.

THE SIN AND DANGER OF GRIEVING THE HOLY SPIRIT OF GOD.

EPHES. iv. 30.

And grieve not the Holy Spirit of God, whereby ye are sealed unto the day of redemption.

BEFORE I enter upon this subject, I will endeavour to satisfy you, that notwithstanding the good purposes you have this day made, and notwithstanding the good prayers which are offered up to God on your behalf, there is yet a greater possibility of your miscarrying than you are aware of.

The reason why I observe this to you is, because I know the frailty of human nature better than you can be supposed to do.

When a person is made sensible of his duty to God, and that it is truly his interest to serve Him faithfully, and that there is great uneasiness and danger in the ways of vice and impiety; while these thoughts are warm in his heart, he is apt to be very confident that he for his part shall never run into that wickedness which others fall into, and by which they are ruined.

And if I should take any of you, (*who have this day been confirmed in your holy purposes of obedience,*)if I should call you aside, and give you this advice: 'Pray have a care lest you fall into the sins of drunkenness, or whoredom, which are but too common amongst us; have a care of lying, or swearing, or stealing, which will certainly shut you out of

SERM. LXXXVI.

heaven;' it is very probable these would be your thoughts, and your answer: 'I am fully resolved against all such great crimes; I have no manner of inclination to drink too much; I know not what it is to be unchaste; but this I know, that it is better to marry than to burn; I am so far from the danger of swearing, that I am uneasy when I hear others swear: and for lying, and stealing, I wonder that any body should fear that I could ever be guilty of such crimes.'

Now, you must know, that this is the confidence of unexperienced Christians; for those that know themselves better, know, that *there is nothing more deceitful than the heart of man*, and that in time, if we give way to our desires, we shall love those very things which now we abhor, and do those wickednesses which at present we had rather suffer death than be guilty of.

[Jer. 17. 9.]

And that you may be satisfied that this is very true, I will give you two instances out of the holy Scriptures,—*one out of the Old, and another out of the New Testament*,—which may convince you, that no man ought to be confident of himself, what he will be, and what he will do; but that it will become the very wisest, and the best of us, to be very careful of our ways, and to look up to God for help, by whose Spirit alone, those that are not as wicked as their neighbours are preserved from being so; and if we do not take care of ourselves, and beg of God to take us under His guidance and blessing, we may too likely fall into those very sins to which at present we have no manner of inclination.

When Elisha told Hazael, that he should do very severe things to Israel, that he would burn their cities, dash their children, and rip up their women with child; Hazael was at that time so far from such thoughts, that he asks, "What, am I a dog, that I should do this?" And yet, in process of time, he did this; and became one of the greatest scourges that Israel had.

2 Kings 8. 12.

St. Peter had, perhaps, as much natural courage as most men, as appears by his behaviour in the garden; and he had positively given his master his word, "If I should die with Thee, I will not deny Thee in any wise;" and yet within twelve hours after, he swears he knows Him not. What account can be given of this? Why, *this* was the cause

[Mark 14. 31.]

of such a strange alteration in the Apostle: he trusted to his own strength, and God for that time left him to himself, and you see what followed.

And so it will ever be, when God, for our sins, leaves us to ourselves. There is not the vilest thing we now abhor, not the basest vice which we may not be guilty of, if ever the Spirit of God gives us up to the government of our own wills.

And now you see, that notwithstanding the good purposes and resolutions you have this day made, and the prayers that have been offered up for you, it is necessary that you should be put in mind of the danger you are in, if, by any wilful continuing in known sin, you grieve the Holy Spirit of God, and force Him to leave you to yourselves.

To come therefore to the words of the text, and to the Apostle's advice, *Grieve not the Holy Spirit of God, whereby ye are sealed unto the day of redemption.*

The plain meaning of these words is this: God has given you the earnest of His Spirit into your hearts, by which you have been taught your duty, by which you have inclinations to perform it, and by which, if you persevere, you will be secured against all dangers, and under all temptations, till you come to heaven, where all dangers will be over.

But take great care, that you grieve not this Holy Spirit, and force Him, by any great wickedness, or by continuing in a wilful course of sin, to leave you to yourself, and to the power of the devil; for if you do this, you are undone for ever; if the Holy Spirit takes off His seal, the devil marks you for himself, and for eternal misery.

And this is literally true, and may be justly said to all you who have this day been confirmed.

God, whose good blessing goes along with the wholesome methods of His Church, has given you such a proportion of His Spirit, as will for the present secure you from danger, and will, as you go on to make use of these measures of grace, still give you greater, till you come to heaven.

Take good heed, therefore, that you do not abuse this great blessing, by making yourselves unfit for the Spirit of God to dwell in your hearts; for if you continue to grieve the Holy Spirit, He will at last leave you; and when you are

SERM. LXXXVI.

left of God, it is not in the power of all the world besides to make you amends for such a loss.

But that you may be more sensible of this, I will lay before you these following things to be seriously considered by you:

First; what your condition is, while you continue under the government and protection of God's Holy Spirit.

Secondly: what your condition and circumstances will be, if you shall be so unhappy as to drive that Holy Spirit from you.

Thirdly; I will shew you what those things are which do most offend and grieve Him.

Lastly; I will propose to you a method of living, which will, by God's good blessing, secure you of His favour, and bring you to heaven.

I. And, first, *what your condition is, while you continue under the government and protection of God's Holy Spirit.*

Rom. 5. 10.

Now while you continue in covenant with God, "you are reconciled to Him by the death of His Son." This frees the mind from fear of future evils. You are under His immediate protection; no temptation shall so far get the dominion over you as to separate you from Christ. If (as the Apostle speaks) God has sent His Spirit into your hearts, whereby you may call upon God as a Father, then you know how tenderly concerned a father is for the welfare of his children. And these expressions are made use of in the holy Scriptures to give us apprehensions of God's favourable concern for His children and servants.

To be particular:

While you continue under the government of God, you are secured from the danger of the great enemy of mankind, the devil, whose power, when God permits him to make use of it, is much greater than is generally thought of. He did

Job, ch. 1.

once but get leave from God to try his force with Job, and you see what a number of calamities fell upon the head of that good man.

And another instance in the New Testament we have, which may convince us of the great power of the devil, when

[Mark 5 13.]

he is let loose to do what he pleases. Two thousand swine were by him at once choked in the sea, when Christ per-

mitted it so to be; which being a single instance of any of our Saviour's miracles which were attended with such a seeming damage, it is most likely it was to convince the world of the great power of the devil to hurt the creatures of God, when God permits him so to do, for the punishment of perverse mankind.

And now, pray consider, what a blessing it is to be assured, that this enemy, with all his power, cannot injure you; and injure you he cannot, while the Holy Spirit of God governs you. He may tempt you to sin, and he may tempt others to seduce you, but then you may be at ease with this Scripture in your heart: "Greater is He that is in you" [1 John 4. 4.] (that is, the Holy Spirit), "than he that is in the world;" that is, the devil.

And this brings us to consider another great advantage which the earnest of God's Spirit secures to you. "Man is [Job 5. 7.] born to trouble, as the sparks fly upward." Afflictions, distempers of body and mind, great crosses, unavoidable calamities, befall all sorts of men. This is an observation made by Solomon: for in that sense his words are; "No man Eccles. 9. 1. knoweth love or hatred by all that is before them." But though afflictions happen to all, yet they have a very different effect upon men, as they light upon the righteous or the wicked.

When afflictions and troubles befall a man whose heart is governed by the Spirit of God, they are so far from being a burden to him, that he receives them thankfully, calls them a fatherly correction, is confident that they are designed for his good, bears them therefore with patience, and grows better, and is really a gainer, by what the world calls misfortunes.

On the other hand; where the Spirit of God is absent, when afflictions seize men, they are impatient, and suffer more by that than by the calamity which caused it; they ascribe all they suffer to the malice of men, or to an ill-governed nature, or to chance, or to any thing but the true cause; and after all their sufferings, they are not one jot the better for what they have undergone.

Let any man judge whether of these two have the better of it.

SERM. LXXXVI.

Lastly; the Spirit of God, which is given you, has this happy effect upon you; you are hereby sealed unto the day of redemption; that is, to eternal happiness. You are not put into immediate possession of heaven; but if the Holy Spirit dwell in your hearts, you are, so long, as sure of heaven as those that are actually there. But then every man that has this hope purifies himself, keeps himself unspotted from the world, and grieves not the Holy Spirit so long, till He is forced to forsake His charge.

II. And this brings us to the *second particular*, which was to consider, *What your condition will be if you should be so unhappy as to grieve and drive that Holy Spirit from you.* If I should only tell you, that then you will be left to yourselves, even that is a most dreadful condition.

We look upon it as a great misfortune, when a young man who is born to a plentiful estate comes to it, and is master of himself, before he has experience to govern either the one or the other: and we judge truly, and it happens accordingly, that an estate to such a man is rather a curse than a blessing.

But sure, to be left to one's-self in a spiritual sense, is a much greater misfortune, as much greater, as the soul is more valuable than the body or an estate: and therefore every wise man heartily begs of God,—"Leave me not in the hands of my own counsel." [Ecclus. 15. 14.]

But though this is bad enough, yet this is not the worst of it. For when the Spirit of God forsakes us, the enemy of mankind takes the government of us; and then we shall soon change our thoughts of things, our desires, our actions; what aforetime we disliked, we shall now esteem; what we had no inclination to, we shall now eagerly covet; and those actions which we have often condemned in others, we shall be guilty of ourselves.

That this is really true, and that such changes as these will certainly happen in every one of you, who shall be so unfortunate as to grieve the Holy Spirit so long till He forsakes you, you may learn from what happens almost every day.

Do not you see people that have been bred up in the Christian religion, and for some time have lived like orderly

professors of Christianity; do not you see them become as careless as if there were neither religion, nor God, nor heaven, nor hell? Others become as much in love with wickedness as if they had had masters to have taught them.

Do not you see people of the same Church, under the same pastors and teachers, having the same advantages of learning and parts, and yet some live orderly and like good Christians, and others run wild, as if they had been bred amongst infidels?

What is the reason of these strange differences? Why, plainly this: those that suffer themselves to be governed by the Spirit of God continue to be the children of God, and His Spirit watches over them for good; and they that drive Him away become like their father the devil, and his works they will do.

To fix this truth in your minds, take this one instance along with you. There is scarce one of *you,* (upon whom I have laid my hands this day,) unless he be a very early sinner indeed, but at this time looks upon drunkenness to be a very bad sort of a vice. You wonder how people can drink when they are not thirsty, what pleasure there can be in making themselves a laughing-stock to every sober body that sees them. But then, pray consider, that every man had the same thoughts of this vice as you now have, when he was of your age, and unacquainted with it. Not the most notorious drunkard, but once in his life was as sober, and was as little inclined to it, as you are this day.

From whence pray conclude, that a man's mind may alter, and that he may so live as to do those things hereafter which he now abhors.

The same may be said of all other sins. A youth who has not lived in a heathenish family, or in a heathenish town, has no more inclination to swear or curse, than he has to eat raw flesh; his stomach rises when he hears an oath; and he is as ready to hide himself from a curse, as if the person had power to inflict as well as to wish damnation. But after all, if this youth shall so far neglect himself, as for company's sake, or any other wicked purpose, to delight himself with the conversation of such people as mind not what they say or swear, it is great odds that he may become as bad as the

SERM. LXXXVI.

worst of his companions. We see it often happens so. And what befalls another may, nay will, befall me, if once I am left to myself.

This consideration furnishes us with a true account of those horrid crimes which are too frequently committed in the world, and which even human nature startles at.

You wonder how a woman can be tempted to murder the child of her womb. You cannot imagine how people come to delight in blood, and make so light of it, as to kill a man for a trifle in comparison. But then you do not consider, that human nature, when once corrupt, is the same in all men. We are all subject to temptations; and if, by our repeated crimes, we should force the divine Spirit to leave us wholly in the power of the devil to manage, no man can tell, no man can foresee, what vile wickedness he shall at last be tempted to commit, nor what unthought-of end he may bring himself unto, while he goes from sin to sin, till he meets with destruction.

That this is a condition, that these are circumstances bad enough, you will easily be persuaded to believe. But yet the condition of those who continue to grieve the Spirit of God by a course of wickedness has something in it more terrible. It is not only to be in a course of life which will lead me to ruin, if I continue in it, but it is to lie under very great difficulties of ever being reformed.

Most sinners propose to themselves some time or other to take up; but what is there in nature which is likely to bring that about? No man ever grew wiser, or more considerate, by continuing longer in the practice of vice. A man's conscience does not, by using to go against it, grow tenderer. On the contrary; every body may observe, that men grow more desperate, more careless, more hardened, the longer they go on in a wicked course of life. This is the almost constant effect of wickedness continued in; and if some great sinners are by some extraordinary method of providence reclaimed, this is great mercy to those particular men;

[Rom. 6. 1.] but this is not to be depended on. *We are not to sin, that grace may abound.* If men escape the dangers of the sea in a cock-boat, this does not, however, encourage others to take such a boat of choice, to make a voyage in.

In short; when men have discharged God out of their minds, by grieving Him with their wicked lives, their circumstances are very sad; they neither do, nor delight in, that which is good, or safe, or praiseworthy; and, what is worse still, they are too likely never to return to sober reason. And that this is a terrible condition, every one of you sees without more arguments.

III. Let us then, in the third particular, consider, *What those things are, which so grieve the Holy Spirit as to force Him to leave us to ourselves.* Pray take notice of what the Spirit of God saith in answer to this: "Whereas they did not like to retain God in their knowledge, God gave them over to a reprobate mind, to do those things which are not convenient." [Rom. 1. 28.]

You see what is the first step to ruin. God puts into our minds good thoughts, good desires; inspires us with holy purposes; shews us the way we should take; checks us when we go wrong; corrects us if we be disobedient; in a word, "God speaks once, yea twice, yet man perceiveth it not." Thus far the Spirit of God bears with us. [Job 33. 14.]

But when once men begin to wish that their consciences would be quiet, that the Spirit of God would not speak to them; when once they strive to quiet their consciences by running into still greater crimes, and are deaf to the soft whispers of the Holy Spirit of God; then is that Spirit said to be grieved: and as a grieved person forsakes the thing which offends him, so the Spirit of God, if men still shut their ears, at last gives them up to a reprobate mind, that is, a mind void of judgment.

When the Holy Scripture speaks of wicked men, we have this expression or some such, in the account of them. *They have not God before their eyes; they have not God in all their thoughts; they live without God in the world.* From whence, pray learn *this great truth,* that when once a person begins to live and act without thinking often of God, he is then in the road to ruin. [Ps. 36. 1; Rom. 3. 18; Ps. 10. 4; Eph. 2. 12.]

That I may speak plain in a matter of such moment, my meaning is this: when a man enters upon any business, though it be his ordinary business, without thinking thus with himself: has not God forbidden me *this* thing; has

SERM. LXXXVI.

not God commanded me *that?* Is this fit for me to do as a man, as a Christian, as one accountable to God? Shall not I by this action injure my neighbour, whom God commands me to love as myself? Will the doing of such a thing be no dishonour to God? Will not my conscience, which is God's vicegerent within me, sometimes reproach me for this?

He that does not ever and anon think thus with himself, will not long retain God in his knowledge; and then you remember what follows,—God gives such men up to a reprobate mind.

IV. To prevent which, let me, in the last place, lay before you, *a method of living, which by God's good blessing may secure to you the comfort and continuance of His Holy Spirit.* The directions shall be very brief, and suitable to your capacities.

First; *pray constantly to God for His direction, guidance, and blessing.* It is as impossible for a man to live a virtuous life without prayer, as it is to live long without food. It was a good saying of a great man, "Prayer will either make you leave off sinning, or sinning will make you leave off praying;" from whence conclude, that from that very day, when you begin to neglect praying to God, from that very day (if you take not up speedily) you may date your ruin.

Secondly; *observe strictly the Lord's day, to keep it holy.* Worldly business, or worldly pleasures, company, or diversions, may make one sometimes forget God; but he that resolves strictly to observe the duties of the Lord's day, will by this means be brought to himself, and to his God, one day in seven; and that may sanctify him for the loss of the six days past. There is likewise a secret blessing that goes along with a conscientious observance of this day.

Thirdly; *read every day some portion of the holy Scripture,* though it be but a few verses, if business should indeed hinder you from reading more; particularly of the New Testament, which is able to make you wise unto salvation through faith in Jesus Christ. There is a certain blessing attends a diligent reading of Scripture, and men are enlightened at times, and by Scripture, when they least expected information. A passage, a verse, a line of Scripture, has

sometimes set men upon thinking, which has ended in a thorough reformation.

Fourthly; *be diligent in that state of life unto which it shall please God to call you.* "Slothfulness" (saith Solomon) "casteth into a deep sleep;" that is, it makes men as senseless, and as unconcerned, as men who are soundly asleep. Besides, idleness, or being out of a man's own calling, lays one open to the temptations of the devil. He has no business with a man who is doing what he should do; but idleness is a temptation to him to turn out of his way to try his skill and strength with you. Prov. 19. 15.

Fifthly; *frequent good company, and those that fear God.* "As iron sharpeneth iron, so a man sharpeneth the countenance of his friend;" so does the fear of God in others beget a fear of God in you. And take this for a rule; he that delights to be in the company of wicked men, whether it be for their wit or learning, or any other advantage, that man is not truly good himself. Prov. 27. 17.

Sixthly; *avoid all temptations to sin; all appearance of evil;* this is the Apostle's direction, and there is good reason for it; for can a man touch pitch, and not be defiled? Or can a man run into temptations, and be confident he shall get clear of them? Assure yourselves, you will meet with enough, without seeking or playing with them; and instead of running into apparent danger, rather pray heartily, "Lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil." [Matt. 6. 13.]

Lastly; endeavour to have *these thoughts of God ever in your mind:* that He is in every place, beholding the evil and the good; that you are accountable to Him for every thing you do; that all your success depends upon Him; that even what we call our misfortunes come from Him; that present and future happiness is in His hands, to dispose of to those that serve Him faithfully; and that He ever respects the humble, and those that look to Him for help and assistance.

These thoughts are grateful to God's Spirit; and while you have these, He will never be grieved or leave you to yourselves.

I have all this while been speaking to the younger sort; but you that are older may reap some benefit from what has been said.

SERM. LXXXVI.

You that have lived in the fear of God the greatest part of your lives, may, from what has been said, learn to whom it is you owe that comfort and blessing, even to the good Spirit of God, which has constantly watched over you for good.

You that have been in the ways of vice, and are by the Spirit of God reclaimed, you will observe what steps they were which led you into error, and how to please that Spirit, which alone, dwelling in you, can preserve you from falling into sin again.

And you also that are yet unreformed, may see what a condition you are in, and how hazardous your circumstances are.

To conclude: both young and old are concerned in these following inferences, which necessarily follow from what has been said.

First; that no person will continue at one certain pitch of wickedness, but either he must reform and be growing better, or he will still grow more vicious and depraved, while God suffers him to live. The reason is this: we none of us act purely of ourselves; but all mankind are governed either by the Spirit of God, or by the power of the devil. Which ever of these two directs us, they will not suffer us to be idle. So long as the Spirit of God continues to rule in our hearts, we shall go from strength to strength, *as the Psalmist speaks,* till we become perfect, and out of the power of hell to touch us; and if we grieve the Holy Spirit, and force Him away, then the Spirit of darkness will not suffer us to be idle, but will find work enough to bring us to himself. For not only one ill habit begets another, but the more a man sins, the less capable he still makes himself of seeing what will be the end of his ways; and the motions and workings of God's Spirit have still less power upon him, till God quite forsakes him, till he fills up the measure of his iniquities, and till he meets with destruction.

And this brings us to a *second observation,* which is, that no man can be secure of himself who will continue in the practice of any known sin; nor can he be sure but that in time he shall fall into the most abominable wickedness. No man can at first bring himself to do such ill things, as by degrees he will make easy to his mind and practice. Consider

but the life of Solomon, as it is recorded in Scripture, the first part of which was so different from the last. What followed his strange depravity, you all learn from God's Word: his kingdom was divided, and a curse of ill manners entailed upon his posterity, which ended in the destruction of his kingdom.

It may just so happen to every man living who knowingly and wilfully allows himself in any one thing which God and nature have made a vice; and there can be no security for any man, until he has, by the grace of God, so far gained upon himself as to be willing and content to hear the voice of God within him, and resolve to be what God and his conscience tell him he should be.

At the very moment of our creation, God designed to govern us by His Spirit; for He made us creatures capable of going astray, and for that reason it was agreeable to His goodness to direct us Himself; and direct us He will, till by our wilful sins we become too wicked for such a guide.

Lastly; God does never withdraw His Spirit from us while we continue fit for such a mercy, that is, while there are any hopes (and God knows it very well) whether His grace shall not still be abused and despised. The truth and goodness of God give us all the assurance imaginable of this; and every man's experience may satisfy him, that God leaves no methods untried, which may become a merciful Father, and just Creator, in order to bring His children and creatures to their duty and happiness.

But though a man may, from the good motions of God's Spirit, hope that he is still within the care of God; that God hath not yet given him up to a reprobate mind; yet he ought not to conclude, that therefore he may still go on in wickedness, and still hope that the same infinite love will evermore save him from ruin. For it is true, God doth wonderfully prevent us, and with great long-suffering bear with His creatures, while there is any hope of a reformation. But when that is over, when we have grieved the Spirit of God too long, and wearied His patience, then followeth the sad state—*to be forsaken of God, and given over to a reprobate mind.*

The conclusion of the whole will be this: that nothing

SERM. LXXXVI.

but the preserving in your minds a sense and fear of God, can secure you from the foulest vices, from the crafts and assaults of the devil, from God's wrath, and from everlasting damnation.

As then we heartily pray to be delivered from these, we are bound to take great heed unto our ways, that we grieve not the good Spirit of God, and force Him to leave us to be governed by our own reason and choices.

May that good Spirit defend us all by His heavenly grace, that we may continue His servants unto our lives end, through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

SERMON LXXXVII.

PREACHED AT AN ORDINATION.

OUR SAVIOUR'S CONCERN FOR THE COMMON PEOPLE, A PATTERN FOR HIS FOLLOWERS, AND ESPECIALLY FOR MINISTERS OF THE GOSPEL.

MATT. ix. 36—38.

But when He saw the multitudes, He was moved with compassion for them, because they fainted, and were scattered abroad as sheep having no shepherd. Then saith He unto His disciples, the harvest truly is plenteous, but the labourers are few. Pray ye therefore the Lord of the harvest, that He will send forth labourers into His harvest.

WHEN the Son of God is moved with compassion, to be sure it is not without cause. And yet we find by experience, (such is our ignorance and the corruption of our nature,) that *that very sight,* which caused compassion in *Him,* is too often amongst *men* an occasion of contempt and disregard.

He could not behold the *multitude* but with concern and pity, and an earnest desire of having their case and misfortunes considered, and taken care of. While the generality of men (who by the providence of God are raised above the common people) are too apt to think the common people not worth so much concern as Jesus Christ would have bestowed upon them.

Without doubt then it must be for want of *knowing,* and being *thoroughly convinced* of, the danger the generality of the world is in, that we are not *all* more affected with their wants and sufferings.

For, verily, the condition of all people, who live without God in the world, is so *forlorn and miserable,* that if it were but well considered, what hazard they run, and what hap-

SERM. LXXXVII.

piness they are like to lose, for want of using their best endeavours to attain it, we could not choose but be moved with compassion, (as our blessed Saviour was,) and strive, at least pray, with all our hearts, that God would raise up men to help them; *that He would send forth labourers into His harvest,* that He would *dispose* and *fit* men with qualifications to instruct the people in the ways of *truth* and *righteousness.*

Now, that what I am going to say to you may be *more edifying,* we shall consider, more particularly,

First; *the occasion of our Saviour's great concern.*

Secondly; we shall see *whether the same reasons for concern are not even now to be found amongst us?* If so, then,

Thirdly; *we shall have equal reason to be affected with pity and compassion, and cheerfully undertake the relief of such as are committed to our care.* And, on the other hand,

Fourthly; *the multitude, for whom we shall have a just compassion, will have reason to be very thankful for the concern we express towards them.*

And these are the particulars which (by God's good blessing) I shall now explain to you.

I. And first, we shall consider *the occasion of our Saviour's great concern and compassion.* The text saith, it was "because they fainted," or were tired and lay down, "and were scattered abroad as sheep having no shepherd."

It is certain, that, to a mind *thoroughly awakened,* there is not a *greater burden* than the sense of *that corruption of our nature* which is every moment leading us into rebellion against God. To know what is good, and not to be able to perform that good; to know that we must all appear before the judgment-seat of God, and at the same time to know that our lives and actions will not bear to be enquired into; to see "a law in our members warring against the law of our minds, and bringing us into captivity to the law of sin." This will make the stoutest heart cry out, "O wretched man that I am, who shall deliver me from this body of death?"

[2 Cor. 5. 10; Rom. 7. 23, 24.]

And this was the very case of the multitude which our Saviour beheld with compassion; and this was the reason of his concern:—They knew the law, and *that the law was holy, and the commandments holy, just, and good.* They were

[Rom. 7. 12.]

sensible that their peace depended upon the observance of that law; and that upon transgressing the law, their conscience would accuse them of guilt, and fill their souls with fears of what might come hereafter. And yet, at the same time, they found themselves under the power of a corrupt nature, strengthened by custom, which became a law to them, *so that when they would do good, evil was present with them.* [Rom. 7. 21.]

In short; they found themselves under a law, which they could not in all points observe; and yet they knew that the Lawgiver expected an entire obedience.

This made them restless, like sheep without a shepherd; this made their condition truly pitiable, and themselves the object of Christ's compassion.

This made Him with so much earnestness at another time invite them: "Come unto Me all ye that travail, and are heavy laden, and I will refresh you, and ye shall find rest unto your souls." [Matt. 11. 28, 29.]

And lastly; it was this consideration which made Him, after so *affecting a manner,* recommend the case of His *scattered flock* to His *disciples,* and in *them,* to all *pastors* of *His Church;* that *they* would, as *He had,* have compassion on them; that they would (*as all good shepherds do*) look after their flock; not leave them to themselves and their own choices, not suffer them to *starve,* or *wander,* for want of food proper for them; but with a merciful hand, helping their infirmities, and supplying all their wants.

II. And now, beloved, let us not fancy, that this was only *the case of people before the preaching of the Gospel.* It is plainly *our own case;* and *our own,* if possible, is more pitiable than *theirs* was.

Let us but look abroad upon the multitude of Christians. How many there are, who know not why they are so; how many, who know their duty, and yet, for want of being seasonably put in mind of it, *forget,* or *neglect* it; how many, who have (as the Apostle speaks) *the form of godliness,* an outward show, *but denying the power thereof;* that is, who do not live answerable to their outward profession. 2 Tim. 3. 5.

Let us consider, how many there are who may have the *words,* but know little of the *meaning,* of the principles of Christianity! How many there are, who find themselves

SERM. LXXXVII.

uneasy, and do not know why; who suspect they are not safe, and yet know not what to do to be so!

Let us look further, and see how many have their very souls and affections so set upon this world, as not to think of a better; how many, who are so pleased with the delights of *this*, as to *despise* a better; how many, who do not really know the hazard they run, or the danger they are in, by taking no more care of their souls!

And lastly; how many there are, who know so little of the happiness which God has prepared for them that love Him, that they know not whether it is worth their while to look after it!

Let us (I say) consider these things, and say, whether there is not as much reason *now*, as ever, for *compassion?* And then let us pray, that God would increase the number and the graces of His ministers; that God would give them a *true compassion*, that is, a just sense of the value of souls, and the reward of those that are instrumental in saving them.

III. And this will make us undertake the work of the ministry, and discharge it, with *cheerfulness, courage*, and *constancy;* for a true compassion will make us do all this.

[Gal. 1. 16.] *First;* with *cheerfulness.* "I conferred not," saith St. Paul, "with flesh and blood." No, truly; if he had done so, he would never have undertaken, or never have gone through, *the work of the ministry.* What then made him undertake so difficult a work? Why, a deep sense of the misery of man. He saw the *world lie in wickedness;* some unavoidably, and some wilfully blind; some careless, and some desperate; some seeking in vain for help, and others despising it: when the *Lord of the harvest* touched his soul with such a compassion as made him resolve (having Christ for his example) to think no *trouble* too much, no *office* too mean, whilst he was doing good, and gaining souls out of the misery in which they were plunged.

And this is *that* which is styled *an inward call;* which is such a disposition of the heart (wrought by the Spirit of God) as obliges a man, out of a sense of duty, and in hopes of doing good, to dedicate himself, and all his labours, to God's immediate service.

And truly, they that desire to come into the ministry, without considering that it is an employment which obliges them to the *strictest virtue*, the *greatest patience*, the *meekest condescension*, and withal *continual labour* and *watchfulness*; *they* may very well doubt of *the truth of their call.*

Secondly; as a true compassion will make us undertake the work with cheerfulness, so it will enable us to go through the undertaking with *courage*;—a very necessary qualification for a minister of Christ. It is St. Paul's advice to Timothy: "Thou therefore endure hardness, as a good soldier of Jesus Christ." How much then do they forget themselves and their calling, who are afraid of men, who are afraid of difficulties, who are afraid of the issue of their labours?—forgetting St. Paul's motto, "Not I, but the grace of God." A good servant, therefore, will be sure to do his duty, and leave the event in the hands of his great Master.

2 Tim. 2. 3.

[1 Cor. 15. 10.]

Thirdly; and as courage is, so is *perseverance*, a necessary qualification for the ministry. "He that fleeth," whether from the danger of the wolf, or for want of temporal encouragements, to be sure, "is an hireling, and careth not for the sheep." It is for want of that *compassion* which our great Master shewed for the multitude going astray, that people first enquire—not *what good can I do*, but—*what shall I get by the service?* And then the consequence is, *I will look to my gains, and let the service shift for itself.*

[John 10. 13.]

But this is not the way of such as fear God. They have other motives for undertaking the charge and cure of souls. They consider how acceptable it must needs be in the sight of God, to spend their days in that very work, for the bringing which about Jesus Christ left the glories of heaven, *to save men from death eternal.* See how the Prophet describes *Him* long before His coming in the flesh: "He shall feed His flock like a shepherd, He shall gather the lambs with His arm, and carry them in His bosom, and shall gently lead those that are with young."

Isa. 40. 11.

What is all this for, but to instruct those that are shepherds, how they are to behave themselves towards their flock; which are all to be carefully tended, as we hope for a reward from the great Shepherd, the Lord Jesus?

And can any of us see with what carefulness and concern

SERM. LXXXVII.

a poor shepherd is employed about his flock? Seeking out their ailments, and proper cures for them: how he is pleased and rejoiced to find such as have gone astray; sparing no pains till he has found what he had lost. Can we see this, without reproaching ourselves?

For do we, with half that affection and application, look after our flocks; seek for such as are astray in the ways of ignorance and impiety; bring them back with gentleness; concluding, that possibly they went wrong for want of knowing better, for want of being taken care of?

Verily, our spiritual flocks have their distempers, their weaknesses, are liable to accidents, to enemies, to death, as well as our other flocks. And they must be attended, or they will perish, and we shall be accountable. So saith the Lord by the Prophet Ezekiel: "The diseased have ye not strengthened, neither have ye healed that which was sick, neither have ye bound up that which was broken: neither have ye brought again that which was driven away; neither have ye sought that which was lost; but with force and with cruelty have ye ruled them." Therefore [ver. 10.] "I will require my flock at your hand." &c.

Chap. 34. 4.

A matter very well worthy of all our consideration. For not only *our* future welfare, as well as *theirs*, depends upon the care we bestow upon them *now*; but even our present satisfaction and comfort, *in some measure*, depend upon the compassion we have for those committed to our care.

IV. For by this means, *the people, for whose safety we express so great concern, will at last be obliged in gratitude to be obedient and thankful to those that take care of them.*

We of the clergy are apt to be uneasy when our people do not respect us as we think *with reason* they ought to do. Why now, the true way to cure people of this fault is, to endeavour to make them sensible of the *real concern*, the *unfeigned love*, we have for them; to make them understand the *value of their souls*, which are committed to *our care*; the *hazard* they are in without *our ministry*.

When once they perceive that our presence amongst them is necessary, and that our labours are really of advantage to them; that they would be apt to forget themselves, their God, and the duty they owe to God and man, if they were

not often called upon and put in mind of all these. If they do but once well understand (and it is our business to make them understand), "that God is in Christ reconciling the world unto Himself, and hath committed unto us the Word of this reconciliation:" that therefore, as they hope for reconciliation and the favour of God, they will not despise *that ministry* which God has ordained. When once people know this, they will respect us for our *works' sake*, for the sake of our office, and for their own souls' sake; and *we shall no longer have reason* to complain of their disregard either for our *persons* or *ministry*. 2 Cor. 5. 19.

And certainly they that think our office and business is easy, and that we enjoy the benefit of their labours for nothing, will be convinced of their mistake, when they see us *faithful in discharging* the several duties of our calling. When they see us *thoughtful for their good;* concerned to know their several wants, and ready to help them; *visiting the sick; comforting the afflicted; warning the unruly; instructing the unlearned; offending some by Christian reproofs;* disobliging others by not complying with their follies. When they see what different sorts of people a clergyman has to deal with; that some are to be comforted, while others are to be terrified, with the judgments of God; that some must of necessity be reproved before all, that others may fear; while others are to be warned and dealt with in private.

As these are thoughts enough to confound one who has this burden upon him (especially if he does not endeavour to acquit himself conscientiously), so these are considerations which will convince all thoughtful people, *that God's ministers do well deserve God's allowance*, while they do *His service* as they are obliged.

And now, beloved, you see whom you undervalue, when you disregard your pastor. One, who is *God's minister;* one, who is bound by his Master's example, *to have the most tender compassion for you:* one, whose office it is, to *watch for your souls, for which he is accountable;* one, who is appointed to declare unto you *the whole will of God.* Without whose ministry your children cannot enter into covenant with God, nor yourselves receive the blessed Sacrament, the seal of God's favour to man. In one word; without

SERM. LXXXVII. [Luke 10. 16.]

whose ministry you cannot hope to be acquitted before God, who (by His Son) has declared to *His ministers,* "he that despiseth you, despiseth Me, and God that sent Me."

As for ourselves, my brethren, God forbid that we should be of the number of those whom the Prophet Jeremiah

Chap. 1. 6. speaks of: "their shepherds have caused them to go astray;"

Chap. 11. 5. or of those the prophet Zechariah mentions: "their own shepherds pity them not." Our great Master has set us another sort of example. And we shall follow His example, if we are indeed sensible of the condition of a soul *destitute of the grace of God.* We shall lament the condition of all such, we shall pity, we shall pray for them, and endeavour to rescue them out of the hands of the enemy. Above all, we shall strive to do this by our *good examples,* by lives as free as *may be* from the pollutions of the world.

It is true, it is a great mistake people run into, when they think that *a life of strict purity and holiness belongs only to the clergy.* As if holiness were not to be the business of every one who hopes to see God in peace.

But thus much we may learn from this way of reasoning: that a clergyman, who does not form his life *according to the rules of the Gospel,* of all men living must not hope to go to heaven.

And though a man may be a true minister without these qualifications (as a very villain may be an ambassador from a good king); yet the scandal would be so great, and the doom so heavy, that it is enough to startle even those that think they may not be of that number, and to make them jealous of their ways.

To conclude: however well we may wish the work of the ministry to prosper; without the blessing of *the Lord of the harvest,* neither the wishes nor the endeavours of the labourers will prosper. For whatever parts or qualifications a man has, unless the Spirit of God incline and enable him to go through the work, he will by no means be equal to the burden he undertakes.

Therefore, our Saviour not only bids us pray the Lord of the harvest, to *send,* to *dispose,* to *qualify,* to *enable* the labourers; but prayed Himself, and continued all night in prayer, for that purpose; by virtue of whose intercession the

Church of God has hitherto been, and will to the end of the world be, supplied with pastors and teachers. But still it is our duty to pray for God's good Spirit to go along with us.

The holy Scriptures give us many instances of the power of this Spirit, when given to men designed for any office ordained of God. And truly, if we had not more reason to depend upon His guidance and blessing, than upon our own good wishes, or best endeavours, the work would go but very indifferently forward.

But Christ, who has commanded us *to feed His flock*, who has promised to "be with us unto the end of the world," [Matt. 28 20.] will, we hope and pray, bless our present undertaking, and all our labours.

To Whom, with the Father and the Holy Ghost, be all honour and glory, world without end. Amen.

SERMON LXXXVIII.

PREACHED AT AN ORDINATION.

THE GREAT BLESSING OF A STANDING MINISTRY.

NUMB. vi. 22—27.

See Exod. 28. 29; Deut. 10. 8; 2 Chron. 30. 27; Joel 2. 16; Ecclus. 50. 21, 22; 2 Cor. 3. 6; 5. 18; Heb. 13. 17; James 5. 14.

And the Lord spake unto Moses, saying, Speak unto Aaron and unto his sons, saying, on this wise ye shall bless the children of Israel, saying unto them, The Lord bless thee, and keep thee: the Lord make His face shine upon thee, and be gracious unto thee: the Lord lift up His countenance upon thee, and give thee peace. And they shall put My name upon the children of Israel, and I will bless them.

THAT which I purpose to do at this time, good Christians, is to lay before you THE GREAT BLESSING OF A STANDING MINISTRY; that you may know how to value so great a blessing, and be thankful to God for it; that you may not be tempted by a wicked world to despise God's ministers; but that you may reap all the benefit of *their* prayers, whom God has appointed to pray for you and to bless you; and whose prayers for you He has promised to hear, if you do not make yourselves unworthy of His blessing.

I have taken a text out of the Law of Moses. It is the solemn blessing with which the priests dismissed the congregation by God's own appointment. The Christian Church uses the same blessing in effect. They both recommend the people to God's blessing and protection.

THE LORD BLESS THEE, AND KEEP THEE; that is, preserve and keep thee from all evil; THE LORD MAKE HIS FACE TO SHINE UPON THEE, by delivering thee out of all thy troubles; AND BE GRACIOUS UNTO THEE, in pardoning thy sins, and passing by thine iniquities: THE LORD LIFT UP THE LIGHT OF HIS COUNTENANCE UPON THEE, or make thee glad and

joyful; AND GIVE THEE PEACE, that is, all manner of prosperity.

And then, that the people might not imagine this to be only an empty ceremony, without any real effect, God assures them, that when His priest thus blesses them in His name, *that He will bless them according to the blessing pronounced over them.* And in the ancient prayers of the Greek Church, the people answered, THE LORD KEEP YOU, SIR, TO BLESS AND SANCTIFY US MANY YEARS[a]; to shew how sensible they were of the benefit of receiving God's blessing by His minister.

And this is what I would endeavour to make *you* sensible of; that is, of THE GREAT BLESSING OF A STANDING MINISTRY.

And this I shall do, by setting before you, *in order,* the work of a minister of God; that you may know how much His ministers contribute to your salvation; and that you may esteem them accordingly. But I must first shew you by what authority they act.

Now, the design of the Christian religion being to restore mankind to the mercy and favour of God, from which we are sadly fallen, it pleased God to send His only Son, to instruct us in the true and only way of becoming holy, that we might be capable of being happy. This He did in His own person while He continued upon earth; but being to return to heaven, He gave authority to His Apostles and their successors, to finish the work which He had begun; that is, to preach the Gospel to all succeeding generations, that the world might have an opportunity of knowing the good pleasure of God, and what men must do to be saved.

The power and commission which Christ gave them is well worth your hearing with the greatest attention. You will find it in the twenty-eighth chapter of St. Matthew, and at the eighteenth verse; and it is as follows: Jesus, speaking to His Apostles, said unto them, "All power is given unto Me in heaven and in earth;" that is, in *heaven* to send down the Holy Ghost to guide you into all truth; and in *earth,* to establish a spiritual kingdom there. "Go ye, therefore, and make disciples to Me in all nations, baptizing

[a] [Missa S. Chrysost. ap. Goar. Eucholog. Græc. p. 86.]

SERM. LXXXVIII

them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost; teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you. And lo!" that is, let the world take notice of it, "lo, I am with you," I, who have all power in heaven and earth, "I am with you," am present with you in the work of your ministry, both to prosper your labours, and to protect your persons, "unto the end of the world;" —*with you*, while you live, and with your successors after your death.

The Apostles having received this commission for themselves and their successors, they immediately set about the work of the ministry; declaring to all nations, "that God was in Christ reconciling the world unto Himself, not imputing their trespasses unto them." And that "He had committed unto them," to them and to their successors, "the Word of reconciliation;" that is, He has committed unto them the preaching of the Gospel, upon the receiving and obeying of which God will be reconciled to mankind.

2 Cor. 5. 19.

So that you see very plainly, that our salvation depends, under God, upon the ministry of those whom Jesus Christ and the Holy Ghost have appointed *to reconcile men to God.*

Jesus Christ knew very well to what a perverse world He sent them: He knew likewise that they were *men*,—men of like passions with those to whom He sent them; and therefore, to guard them and His own authority, as much as may be, from contempt, and to oblige the world to hear them with reverence, He declares, that He will look upon Himself as injured, in the contempt any man shews to *His* ministers; and that in them God is heard, or despised. "He that heareth you (saith our Lord) heareth Me; and he that despiseth you despiseth Me; and he that despiseth Me despiseth Him that sent Me."

Luke 10. 16.

This is one of the blessings of a STANDING MINISTRY. We have men commissioned by Jesus Christ, who stand obliged to teach nothing but what they have learned from Him, *what He has commanded them;* who are under the conduct of His Spirit; and who have the promise of Christ to be present with them in the exercise of their ministry.

We now come to consider, IN WHAT THEIR MINISTRY CONSISTS. And, in the *first place*, as stewards over the house of

God (for so they are called), their duty is to receive into His household and family, which is His Church, all such as are capable or desirous of becoming members thereof; and this they do by the sacrament of baptism, appointed by Christ Himself for that end; by which they are put into the way of salvation. This is another blessing of a standing ministry, and it will appear to be a very great one, when it is considered, that *this* power was committed, by Christ Himself, to His Apostles and to their successors, as you heard in the commission given to them, and just now read to you.

In the next place, the work of the ministry consists in *preaching the Gospel;* that is, in convincing men that they are sinners; that as such, they stand in need of God's mercy; for that a day is coming when God will call all men to an account, and judge them according to their works: that their works will be judged good or evil, as they agree with the Gospel, or are contrary to it.

Now, it is the duty of a minister of God to *study the Gospel,* that he may be able to declare what it *commands,* and what it *forbids;* to put Christians in mind of their duty, which they are but too apt to forget; to exhort them to follow it, and to rebuke them when they walk contrary to it; to set before them the terrors of the world to come, when they see them careless and unconcerned; and to comfort them with the mercies of God in Jesus Christ, whenever they are afflicted with the burden of their sins. Who does not see *the great blessing of such a ministration?*

But this is not all. Christians are subject to sin, to forfeit the favour of God, to make themselves liable to His anger both here and hereafter. What must they do to escape the wrath to come? Why, Jesus Christ has ordained a Sacrament of reconciliation, and has appointed His ministers the dispensers thereof, to all such as with hearty repentance and true faith turn unto God; by which their pardon is sealed, and their graces increased. Is this a blessing to be despised?

But besides this, the ministers of Christ, as the priests had under the Law, have a daily charge upon them: they stand obliged, either publicly or in private, to offer to God the prayers of the Church in behalf of their own flock; to confess their own sins, and the sins of their people; to give

SERM. LXXXVIII

God thanks for the mercies He bestows upon them; to beg His protection and His blessing upon them, and upon their labours. And he must sure be a person of a profane spirit, who does not think this a very great blessing indeed.

Whatever little esteem Christians may have for the ministers of Christ while they are in health, and at ease; yet whenever it pleases God to visit them with sickness, or any grievous affliction, they will then be apt to value their pastor, and think his presence and his help necessary. The *afflicted* will want words of comfort, to support their dejected spirits, as well as direction how to bear, and how to profit by, their troubles. And they that are sick, and have any faith in God's Word, will, as St. James advises, send for the minister of God, that he may pray over him, that he may examine the sincerity of his faith, and his repentance, and that, if he is truly penitent, he may receive absolution, which the Spirit of God assures him shall have a real effect. "If he have committed sins, they shall be forgiven him."

James 5. 15.

These are they, by whose ministry you are made Christians; they to whom the care of your souls is committed; who have Christ's commission to teach you, to pray for you, and to bless you in His name; to reconcile you to God, and God to you. They are, (as St. Paul calls them, 1 Cor. iv. 1,) "They are stewards of the mysteries of God;" dispensers of His merits, and His graces to His elect. By whom He *instructs* them in the truth; *feeds* them with the Bread of Life; by whom He *comforts* afflicted souls, *absolves* the penitent, *arms* them against the fear of death, and *fits them* for a blessed eternity.

In one word; the ministers of the Gospel, and the ordinances to them intrusted, are the ordinary means, by which God does *teach, edify, bless,* and *save* His people. To whom the true, THE EVERLASTING COVENANT OF PEACE, (mentioned Numbers XXV. 12, 13,) THE COVENANT OF AN EVERLASTING PRIESTHOOD, is committed. A priesthood that must continue (for so Jesus Christ assures us) as long as this world lasts.

Let me only add the character which our blessed Lord gave His ministers, in the persons of His Apostles: "Ye are the salt of the earth;" that is, they are designed by God to preserve the world, as much as may be, from corruption, (as

Matt. 5. 13.

salt does other bodies,) and by that means hindering the judgments of God from falling upon them.

Thus I have set before you, a few of the MANY BLESSINGS OF A STANDING MINISTRY. It is true, these blessings would be more visible, if every minister of God would do what his duty requires of him, and what he promised at his ordination.

If godly discipline were restored and countenanced; if none were admitted into holy orders, but such as are qualified and likely to be an honour to God and to religion; if men would not take upon them to convert others, until they themselves are converted; if men would undertake the holy calling out of true love for God and for the souls of men; if such as have taken the cure of souls would, with faithful diligence, *preach the Word, visit the sick, prepare dying persons for the account they are going to give; if their sermons were plain and practical,* and always aimed at the necessities and the salvation of those that hear them; if they would always *administer the Sacraments* with great devotion, *doing holy things after an holy manner;* and every morning and evening, as they are enjoined, offer the sacrifice of prayers and thanksgiving for their whole flock, that God may bless them and their labours, and deliver them from evil. In short; if they would endeavour to preserve the *power* as well as the *form* of godliness; and take care that the ministry be not blamed through any liberties they take; this, I say, would contribute very much towards the convincing all well-disposed Christians that A STANDING MINISTRY IS ONE OF THE GREATEST OF BLESSINGS.

But after all, the personal failings of ministers do not make void the commission which they have received from God TO BLESS HIS PEOPLE IN HIS NAME. We know that Judas himself was sent by Christ with a commission to preach the Gospel; and we have no reason to doubt but that he did it with effect. We know that a civil magistrate is to be obeyed and honoured, *because he has authority from above,* [John 19. 11.] let him be never so irregular in his private life. It is the *commission,* the *power,* the *business* he is sent about, and the *authority which sends him,* which we are to consider, and not the failings of the man.

SERM. LXXXVIII

And, as no man in his senses would despise a pardon for his life, because he does not like the messenger that brings it; even thus absurd is it, to overlook and despise *the Word of peace,* the sacraments of reconciliation, the prayers, the blessings, of a priest, an ambassador of the Most High God, because he is poor, or not very learned, or because he has failings like other men.

Be assured of it, therefore, good Christians, if you, on your part, do not hinder God's graces and blessings from falling upon you, God will vouchsafe them to you, upon the prayers of His ministers. "When you go into an house," saith our Lord to His Apostles, "salute it;" that is, beg that God's blessing may be upon it; "and if a son of peace be there," that is, any one desirous to hear the truth, and to do the will of God, "your peace," that is, the peace and blessing of God, "shall rest upon him;" if not, "it shall turn to you again." Here is a certain effect promised upon the blessing prayed for by God's minister; as sure to the *eye of faith,* as any thing that is visible to the *bodily eye.*

[Matt. 10. 12; Luke 10. 6.]

When people do not edify under those whom the providence of God has set over them, they are but too apt to lay the blame on the minister of God; either because he wants abilities, or has some failings. They imagine that the ordinances, in his hands, have not that influence which they might otherwise hope for. But humility should oblige them rather to fear that the fault may be in themselves, and that if God denies them His graces, it is because of some secret or known sin which they indulge, and will not part with. Besides, it generally happens, that the *same ministrations* have their saving effects upon some, while others are no way bettered by them. For as the same sun hardeneth clay and melteth wax, so the *same ministrations* do only serve to increase the guilt of some, while they become effectual means of salvation to others.

[Luke 7. 30; Acts 13. 48.]

They that were disposed for eternal life, (saith St. Luke,) believed; while others rejected the counsel of God for their good, and perished for want of faith. Both had the same Gospel preached unto them, and the same offers of salvation.

I know it is with difficulty that people will believe that

their eternal salvation can depend upon the ministration of a man like themselves. But so most certainly it is. It depends, *by the appointment of Jesus Christ,* upon *baptism,* administered by a man like ourselves, but having authority from God; it depends upon the *sacrament of reconciliation,* after relapse into sin, and this administered by a man like ourselves: even as much as the lives of the children of Israel, when bitten by serpents, depended upon looking upon the *brazen serpent* set up by Moses;—or as much as the stopping of the plague depended upon Aaron, the priest of God, his burning of incense. [Numb. 21. 9; 16. 47, 48.]

And though there is no question to be made of it, but God can dispense with His own ordinances, when He thinks fit, and save a sincere soul without them; yet it is *as sure,* He will not save such as despise His ordinances, or wilfully neglect to make use of them.

In short; let men be never *so great,* never *so learned,* never *so knowing,* never *so good* in their own eyes, they must receive the blessing of God by the hands of His own ministers. He will save men in His own way; and will be glorified in making use of weak instruments, to bring about the greatest works; will make use of frail men to destroy the power and kingdom of Satan, and to bring men to heaven.

"We have this treasure" (saith the Apostle), "we have this treasure in earthen vessels, that the excellency of the power may be of God, and not of man;" that is, that such as shall receive the Gospel may be convinced, that their conversion was the work of God, and not of man; and that such as administered the means of salvation might not proudly ascribe the success to themselves, but unto God. 2 Cor. 4. 7.

And God did most surprisingly *confound the wisdom of the wise,* at the first preaching of the Gospel, by bringing about, through the *foolishness of preaching,* (as the same Apostle speaks,) that which all the learned world, by their great wisdom, were not able to do. [1 Cor. 1. 19, 21.]

And, indeed, God's great design in the Gospel is, to HUMBLE MEN, that they may be convinced, that they owe every thing to Him, and to Him alone. He therefore sent His Son in the *form of a servant,* that He might bring down the high minds of the proud. The same Son of God made

SERM. LXXXVIII

choice of His Apostles out of the lowest condition of life, to teach and instruct the *great*, the *wise*, and the *learned* men of the world. He appointed *these* and their successors to be the messengers and ministers of salvation to the greatest men on earth. The doctrines these preached were the most strange, and the most unwelcome to flesh and blood. Such as these; that the salvation of men depended upon the believing in Christ crucified, in renouncing of our own wisdom, in mortification, and self-denial.

And as His *ministers* made no great appearance *to the eye of flesh*, no more did the *means He ordained* for conveying His favours and blessings to men.

He appointed them to be baptized with water FOR THE REMISSION OF SINS: He vouchsafed especial gifts and graces of His Spirit, by the LAYING ON OF THEIR HANDS:—He appointed a sacrament of reconciliation, consisting of BREAD AND WINE, which, being given and received with faith in Him, should be a sure pledge of *their* pardon and salvation, who devoted themselves to His service.

Lastly; He appointed *His* ministers, not the ministers of earthly princes, nor the princes themselves, to receive into His Church and kingdom such as they should deem worthy, and to turn out the unworthy; with this assurance, "that what they should bind on earth, should be bound in heaven; and what they should loose on earth, should be loosed in heaven."

Matt. 18. 18.

To despise, therefore, the Word and Sacraments, the blessings and favours of GOD, because they are offered to us through the hands of the meanest of men, is plainly to despise our own salvation. And if there are any so unhappy as to carry their folly and prejudices so far as to look upon the means of salvation, which God has appointed, as unnecessary, or not likely to convey His blessings and graces to them, there is no help for it; they must undoubtedly perish.

We know that there are people, who are very confident that they can do well enough without *these ministrations;* that they can read and understand the Bible, and their duty, without a teacher; that if they are morally good, just in their dealings, sober in their lives, and kind to their neighbours, this is what God will be pleased with. "What

Micah 6. 8.

doth the Lord thy God require of thee, but to do justly, and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with thy God?"

This is certainly true, if rightly understood. But then let it be remembered, that this was spoken to the people of Israel, who had *priests*, and *sacraments*, and *sacrifices*, and *ordinances*, as well as Christians. And if an Israelite should have pretended to be *just*, and *merciful*, and to walk *humbly with God*, without *circumcision*, without *sacrifice*, and other ordinances of the Law, that soul would have been cut off, he would have been rejected of God and man. Every body that reads the Bible must see this.

And indeed, what the Prophet intends by these words is, to blame those Israelites who placed all their religion in observing the outward ordinances, and took no care of the inward man, or of those duties of *justice, mercy,* and *the love of God,* which all these ordinances aimed at.

So we say, that *holiness of life* is that which God requires as the principal thing *without which no man must see the Lord.* But then we are sure, that this holiness consists, *first,* in OBEDIENCE TO GOD, in submitting to what *He has* appointed in order to make us holy, in hearing, and submitting to *His* ministers, who are appointed for the edifying of the Church; in receiving the sacraments, the means of grace, at their hands; and in obeying their godly admonitions. [Heb. 12. 14.] Eph. 4. 12.

And lastly, and which is the great thing aimed at by all these ordinances, *in leading a life becoming the servants of God.*

This, we are sure, is God's *ordinary way* of bringing men to *holiness,* in order to their *happiness.* For we are not here saying any thing of what God *can do* if He please, or how He will deal with those who are destitute of these means of salvation; but we speak of Christians who are *blessed with a standing ministry,* and who enjoy the means of salvation *by them administered.*

And we must not wonder, that the world continues still so bad, notwithstanding *this blessing of a standing ministry.* Thus it was, even when our Lord and His Apostles preached the Gospel. Many would not hear; many heard, but laid it not to heart; many suffered the cares, and riches, and plea-

SERM. LXXXVIII

sures of the world to choke the seed, so that it brought no fruit to perfection. And so it will be to the end of the world. All that continue to grieve the Holy Spirit, by which they have been sanctified,—their unimproved graces will be taken from them,—they will become again the subjects of Satan, and be led by him captive at his will.

But after all, and as bad as the world is, we may be sure of it, it would be much worse, were there no standing ministers of God, to put men in mind of their duty and of their danger. *God,* His *Word,* His *Sabbaths,* and His *Laws,* would soon be forgotten, as they have been by the whole heathen world.

Rom. 11. 13.

And now, good Christians, do not imagine, that it is for *our own sakes,* but for yours, THAT WE THUS MAGNIFY OUR OFFICE, as St. Paul speaks. It is, that *you* may know what a blessing you enjoy, that you can *hear God's Word,* and *know His will, and partake of His ordinances,* and *receive His blessing,* by the hands of His own ministers; and that you may be sensible of the danger of despising so great salvation, of thinking yourselves too wise to be taught by the meanest of God's ministers, or too good to be blessed and prayed for by the most unworthy of His servants.

And be assured of it, that they who despise God's ministers will at last despise the Gospel of Christ. This we are sure of, from experience, as well as from Christ Himself; and when this sin becomes general, it is a sure forerunner of destruction.

The Lord Jesus Christ, the Prince of pastors, was despised and rejected of men, even of His own people. And what followed? Why, that whole nation was in a short time *rejected,* and became slaves to all the nations of the world.

Under the law, God shewed His displeasure and His judgments, in many instances, against such as either *invaded the priesthood,* or *despised His ministers.* The Jews lived more by *sight* than by *faith,* and they were visibly punished for their profaneness.

We who live under a better constitution, who are to believe things invisible, and TO WALK BY FAITH, should remember, that the punishments of the next life are much more severe than those inflicted upon sinners in this world.

Our Saviour saith expressly, that *their* condition, who reject His Gospel and His ministers who publish it, "that it shall be more tolerable for Sodom and Gomorrah, in the day of judgment, than for them." [Matt. 10. 15.]

And the same Lord Christ has declared it to be the crime of an heathen, of one who believes not in God, to despise the sentence and judgment of the Church and her governors in things of a spiritual nature.

The Spirit of God commands you, as Christians, "to esteem the ministers of Christ very highly for their works' sake." "For they watch for your souls, as they that must give an account." And St. John gives this distinguishing mark of the Spirit of truth and the spirit of error: "He that knoweth God heareth us" (that is, Christ's lawful ministers); "and he that is not of God heareth not us." 1 Thess. 5. 13. Heb. 13. 17. 1 John 4. 6.

And now, Christians, having endeavoured to make you sensible of the *very great blessing of a standing ministry*, I shall conclude the whole with a few useful observations. The first shall be in the words of an eminent Jew, (Maimonides,) "Do not say what availeth the blessing of this simple priest; for the blessing depends not on him, but upon the Most Holy God." Do not, therefore, mistake, and think, that when the minister of God prays for you, or blesses you, or administers to you the ordinances of God, that he does it as an ORDINARY, PRIVATE PERSON. No; he does it as *God's minister*,—as one *authorized to bless you* with sure effect, if it be not your own fault. Who does it, as St. Paul speaks, IN THE PERSON, or place, OF CHRIST. [2 Cor. 2. 10.]

You see therefore, the *profaneness* of those who would prostitute the ordinances of God, and would make them, and the ministers of Christ, contemptible. They do not consider the *presumption* it would be to take upon themselves to administer sacraments; that is, to *seal covenants* betwixt God and men, without any commission from God; to take upon themselves to be the *ministers of reconciliation, to reconcile men unto God, and God to man*;—to *bless* in His name, and to pretend to *obtain graces* and *blessings* from God to His people.

To proceed: if you then really value the prayers, the blessing of God's ministers, you will respect their persons

SERM. LXXXVIII

and their office. And when you remember that they are *God's ministers,* you will conclude, that the Master is always dishonoured, when His servants are slighted. And most certainly, he that despises a minister of Christ, would have done so by Christ Himself, when He was on earth; "He was despised and rejected of men," by such men as those who despise His ministers.

[Is. 53. 3.]

Has the Christian Religion any thing in it that is ridiculous? Is the Christian ministry a ridiculous institution? No, sure. Why then do so many take pleasure in hearing them ridiculed? Why, the secret is this: their lives being corrupt, they cannot but wish in their hearts, that there were no truth in religion; and that the ministers of Christ, who stand bound by their office to put them in mind of that terrible judgment, which, without a true repentance, will one day be pronounced upon them;—they use their utmost endeavours, that these ministers of Christ may be *despised, discredited,* and set t nought, and that they may sin without rebuke.

Lastly; if the priest, the minister of God, blesseth *with a real effect* all those that repair to the Church to receive God's blessing, how unhappy are they who are *shut out of the Church* for their crimes, and consequently are deprived of the blessing of God! And how unhappy are all they who deprive themselves of this blessing, by *absenting* themselves from the public assemblies of Christians! Little do Christians consider what they lose by doing so.

And now, good Christians, I cannot end this discourse better than by *pronouncing this blessing,* in the name of Christ, which I made choice of for a text: "The Lord bless you, and keep you; the Lord make His face to shine upon you, and be gracious unto you; the Lord lift up the light of His countenance upon you, and give you peace, now and evermore." Amen.

SERMON LXXXIX.

PREACHED AT AN ORDINATION.

RECIPROCAL OBLIGATIONS OF CHRISTIAN MINISTERS AND THEIR PEOPLE.

HEB. xiii. 17.

They watch for your souls, as they that must give an account.

See Deut. 33. 11; Ecclus. 7. 29; Luke 6. 39; 10. 20; John 10. 11; 17. 16; 1 Cor. 1. 1; 2 Cor. 6. 3; 1 Thess. 5. 13; 1 Tim. 4. 14, 16.

HERE are two sorts of hearers greatly concerned in these words—*Christian pastors,* and the *people of their flock.* The *first* have very great reason to be concerned for the account they must one day give of the souls of those that are committed to their care. And the *second* should consider, how much they owe to the good providence of God, for appointing His own ministers, under the most strict obligations, TO WATCH FOR THEIR SOULS; and what account *they* also must give, if they have not profited by their pastor's care.

And may that Holy Spirit, who has given us this warning, enable me to speak upon these *two particulars,* so as to edify both myself and you that hear me; for we are all of us, you see, concerned in an account we must give to God, that we may have *this account* very much in our minds.

We shall begin with the account we ourselves are to give of the souls committed to our care. And what bishop, what priest, what minister of God, can seriously think of this without trembling?

Many are the duties of our sacred calling; many are the temptations we meet with to neglect them. The mischiefs that follow such neglects are many and great; and the punishment, without repentance and amendment, to be dreaded above all things.

These are, indeed, very great discouragements for any man to undertake so great a charge; but then the reward of a faithful discharge of these duties will be so very great (as

SERM. LXXXIX.

the Holy Spirit assures us), and the helps so certain, and advantages so many, and the occasions of glorifying God, and of doing good to the souls of men, will be such, as one who loves God would be thankful to be made an instrument in so glorious a work, notwithstanding the trouble that will attend it.

We will first consider the ends for which men are ordained to the ministry, that they themselves, and all Christians, may see the great blessing they enjoy, who live under a godly ministry.

They are ordained for these great ends:

To preserve the knowledge of the true God amongst men: which is entirely lost amongst so many heathen nations.

They are appointed to make Jesus Christ and His Gospel, and the goodness and mercy of God manifested therein, known unto men.

They are to keep men's consciences awake, by setting before them the certainty and the terrors of a judgment to come.

They are to convince men of the great corruption of our nature; and that we must be converted, and become new creatures, before God will take any pleasure in us;

And that this life is the only time allotted us for this work, to be restored to the image of God by a true conversion, by a true and sincere repentance, and by works meet for repentance.

Now, the way they are appointed by God to do these things is,

First; by their *sermons* and other pious *instructions: secondly;* by their *good examples: thirdly;* by a *godly discipline:* and *lastly;* by their *prayers.*

First; *by their sermons and other pious instructions.* A minister of Jesus Christ ought very seriously to think of the complaint God made: "My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge." This, God knows, may be said of too many Christians. They perish, for want of knowing the bondage of man by sin, the manner of our redemption by Jesus Christ, and the power of God's grace to deliver us: subjects which can never be insisted on too often.

Hos 4. 6.

On the other hand, sermons will be of little or no use, if

they are not plain, and suited to the *necessities*, and to the *capacities*, of the people to whom we preach, and if they tend not to the salvation of their souls; either to humble, and cast them down, under the sense of the danger they are in on account of their sins; or to raise them up, by letting them see the necessity and comfort of closing with the terms and promises of the Gospel. To such sermons as these it is that God gives His blessing.

St. Paul mentions another way of teaching, which, to be sure, he found the blessed effects of; "he taught from house to house," as well as in the Church. And certainly, a private instruction very often makes the deepest impression upon the minds of men; and, in many cases, may be of more use than ten sermons. Acts 20. 20.

The next way by which a minister of God is to teach his people is BY HIS GOOD EXAMPLE. "Ye are," saith our Lord to His disciples, "Ye are the salt of the earth." What is the meaning of this? Why, it is to keep others from corruption, as salt does the things that are liable to be corrupted and spoiled. [Matt. 5. 13.]

It was for this reason the Apostle enjoins Titus, to shew himself in all things a pattern of good works. Chap. 2. 7.

Sermons, though never so good, are not always understood or minded by common people; but a good, a sober, a pious life and example is a language that every body understands.

How often doth our Lord, in His last prayer for His disciples, repeat these words, "They are not of the world, even as I am not of the world;" but to teach His ministers how different their lives ought to be from the lives of worldly people; that they should avoid not only scandalous sins (for then they are plainly ministers of Satan), but all that is offensive, vain, trifling, and useless, every thing that is unbecoming the character of a minister of Jesus Christ. [John 17. 16.]

DISCIPLINE, in the next place, is another means which God hath put into the hands of His ministers, in order to keep men from ruining themselves and others.

It is true, no man can be forced to forsake his sins and be converted. But when men become careless of their own salvation, the Church owes this case to her children, to hinder them as much as possible from corrupting others, and

SERM. LXXXIX.

leading them to hell. And a minister of God doth in some measure become guilty of those sins, which he doth not hinder by all means becoming the Spirit of the Gospel.

And if people would but consider the ends of Church discipline, it would be matter of joy and thankfulness that God has appointed His ministers to take especial care of this matter; for the ends of discipline are, to endeavour to convert sinners, that their souls may be saved; to hinder the plague of wickedness from spreading; and that the judgments of God upon the land may be prevented by the repentance of its inhabitants, and that God in all things may be glorified.

But if, instead of seeing these good ends of Church discipline, people will be uneasy and angry, when they are called to an account and rebuked for crimes which would otherwise ruin them, and the ministers of Christ looked upon as their mortal enemies; they must know, that just so the devil treated Christ Himself, when He commanded him to leave
Luke 8. 28. the man whom he had taken possession of; "What have I to do with Thee," said he to our Lord, "art Thou come to torment me?"

In one word: if baptism be accounted a blessing, Church discipline is so too: they being both appointed by the same Spirit of God, by the same author of our salvation, the Lord Jesus Christ.

Matt. 18. 15.

And Christians would do well to think of it, that not to shew their dislike and abhorrence of every thing that may offend God, or injure our neighbour, is to join in the sin, and in the guilt that attends it; which every man doth, who converses with wicked men without scruple. They harden the sinner, and hazard their own salvation.

Now, God having lodged a power in the pastors of the Church, to prevent as much as is in their power the growth of wickedness, it is their duty to do this; that is, as was said before, *by all means becoming the Spirit of the Gospel*; by exhortation, by reproof, by rebukes, private and public, by denying them the public worship; and, when none of these methods will reform them, by shutting them out of the Church, and the communion of the faithful, by a solemn excommunication.

And no Christian must say that he values and loves the Church of Christ, or Christ Himself, when he opposeth this authority of her pastors, and the discipline which He Himself has appointed; nor must any minister of Christ think himself excused from remissness in this duty, by the opposition he may meet with; we being all answerable for the wickedness occasioned by the neglect of this means of grace, and ought to consider that we have more souls besides our own to answer and account for.

To these means of grace there is another, never to be forgot or omitted; and this is, the duty of *praying daily* for a *blessing* upon our labours, and upon our flock, and upon all other means of grace and salvation. Without this we shall be forced, when we come to die, to use the words of St. Peter to our Saviour: "We have toiled all the night," Luke 5. 5. all our lives, "and have taken nothing."

Grace we cannot give: that is the gift of God, and must be prayed for. We must pray, therefore, for His grace and blessing upon our studies, upon our sermons, upon ourselves; that we may be living examples of all the graces and virtues which we recommend to others. We must pray for a blessing upon the discipline of the Church; for sinners, that they may be converted; for such as are in error, that they may see the truth; and that God may increase the number, and the graces, of such as love and fear Him. And we should never forget to pray, that God may bless the persons of all those, who by their own labours do minister to our necessities.

And let us remember, that this was a most especial charge and duty upon the priests under the law of Moses. A morning and evening sacrifice was appointed to be offered, for every soul in Israel, who through necessity, distance of place, or sickness, could not attend upon the temple service; pursuant to which, our Church has laid the same charge upon her ministers, as every clergyman knows who consults her canons and rubrics.

And when people are satisfied that their pastors do pray for God's blessing upon them, their families, and labours (*without which, all their labours will be to little purpose*), they will not be so apt to grudge them that fruit and recompence

SERM. LXXXIX.

of their labours, which God and the laws have assigned them.

I said indeed, that *all their labours, without God's blessing, will be to little purpose;* and I had God's authority for saying so. Do but consult the first chapter of the prophet [ver. 6.] Haggai; there the Lord tells the Jews, that they had sown much and brought in little; and that he that earned wages put it into a bag with holes, because the house and service of God was neglected.

Chap. 3. 10. And the Lord, by Malachi His prophet, challenges the people to try Him, His power, and goodness: "Bring ye," saith He, "all the tithes into My store-house, that My service may be kept up; and prove Me, if I will not open the windows of heaven, and pour you out a blessing, that there shall not be room to receive it."

We know very well what unthoughtful people are ready to say to this, *that this is preaching for ourselves.* But it is really preaching for them, and for their benefit, or else this Bible which I have in my hand is not the Word of God.

We shall, therefore, now go on to consider, what encouragement *a minister of Christ* has to go on in the way of his duty, notwithstanding all outward discouragements he may meet with.

And, indeed, one great happiness it is for a minister of God, that the duties he promiseth to perform will help to change his heart, and create in him those dispositions which will make him faithful to his great Master. For example:

He promises to read the holy Scriptures daily. He will then have daily before his eyes, the *example*, the *instructions*, and the *precepts* of Jesus Christ, the rewards and punishments of the life to come.

When he instructs the youth in the catechism of the Church, he will be obliged to let them see how far we are fallen from grace, and what pains we must take to be restored to the image of God, as ever we hope to be saved; and when he doth this to any saving purpose, he cannot but be convinced, how much he himself is concerned in so necessary a work, and change of heart and life.

It will be impossible to converse with poor and needy people, as he will be obliged to do, without partaking of that

Spirit of Jesus Christ, who went about doing good; without being meek and humble, as knowing, that if any one of us are in better circumstances than another, it is purely the gift of God, and for the benefit and good of others.

When he reads Divine Service with devotion, he will beget devotion in himself, as well as in those that hear him.

When his sermons are plain and practical, they will necessarily affect his own heart, as well as the hearts of his hearers.

Every child he baptizeth will put him in mind of the vows that are upon himself.

And the administration of the Lord's Supper cannot be performed as it ought to be, without filling his soul with holy and devout thoughts, as well as with an holy fear, lest he should offer the prayers of the faithful with polluted lips, or distribute the bread of life with unclean hands. And the oftener he celebrates this holy mystery, the more will his love for Jesus Christ, whose love and death he commemorates, be increased.

In visiting sick and dying persons, he will be put in mind of his own mortality; and in endeavouring to fit them for the account they are to give of their lives, he will of necessity be put in mind of a much greater he himself must soon give of his own.

When he reproves, exhorts, admonishes others, he can hardly do it without being put in mind of the words of the Apostle: "Thou that teachest another, teachest thou not thyself?" Rom. 2. 21.

If he is diligent in prayer, which he has promised faithfully to be, God will certainly enlighten his mind with saving truths and graces. And an earnest desire to save souls will cause him to be beloved of God, and honoured by men, assisted by the Holy Spirit, and rendered able to give an account with joy, and see the fruit of his labours.

In short; the faithful discharge of these duties will secure our peace, and our hope in God, and make our account less dreadful.

Let us now consider the duties which God requires of Christians for this care He hath shewn to appoint His own ministers "to watch for their souls, as they that must give

SERM. LXXXIX.

an account." Hear what our Lord Christ Himself saith to His ministers: "Whosoever shall not hear your words, it shall be more tolerable for the land of Sodom, in the day of judgment, than for that people." And for Christians' better encouragement, He assures them, that he who receives His ministers receiveth Him Himself, and God that sent Him.

Matt. 10. 14, 15, 40.

In them, therefore, God is *received, heard,* or *despised.* Their authority, while they govern themselves by His Word, is the authority of God. "He therefore that despiseth," (they are St. Paul's words,) "despiseth not man, but God." And therefore the same Apostle directeth Christians to esteem them very highly in love for their works' sake.

1 Thess. 4. 8.

And then for their right to an honourable maintenance, St. Paul assures all Christians, that the Lord Himself ordained, "that they which preach the Gospel should live of the Gospel." And therefore, when we tell people of the great sin of defrauding the ministers of God, and of denying the rights which the laws of God and man have appointed them, we are doing our duty as faithfully, as when we set before them the sin of *stealing,* of *adultery,* or of any other breach of the commands of God, which will be followed with a curse in this life, and, if not repented of, with damnation hereafter.

[1 Cor. 9. 14.]

I shall detain you no longer, than while I conclude this discourse with these following observations:

In the first place, you will observe how necessary it was, that the Church of God should appoint certain times, which should be solemnly observed by all Christians, for begging of God to send faithful pastors to serve in the sacred ministry, such as may, both by their life and doctrine, set forth the glory of God, and set forward the salvation of men. And every man would do well, before he reproaches any clergyman for his conduct, to ask himself this question: Have I myself done my duty, and joined with the Church of God to pray for all such as are called to the ministry, that they may live worthy of their vocation?

In the next place, we must beg all that hear us to consider, that the contempt of God's ministers will end in the contempt of God Himself, of His Word, His worship, and of every thing that belongs to Him.

In short; Christians' respect for their pastors, and the ministers of God, ought to be very great, as they expect God's blessing; but then the ministers of God ought to make it their great endeavour to deserve this respect, by a *sober, prudent, serious, godly,* and *pious* life and conversation; ever remembering, that by a *mean, light,* and *foolish* conduct, unbecoming the dignity of one who calls himself, and ought to be, God's ambassador to men, he will render the ministry contemptible, and cause men to be guilty of that disrespect and sin which he complains of.

Lastly; we should all consider, that a man may have a lawful call to the ministry, and as such, ought to be obeyed in things pertaining to God; and yet, for want of answering the ends of his calling, he may oppose the great and gracious design of God, who would have all men to be saved.

May God of His great mercy preserve this Church from such pastors, and give all those, who have been, or are to be, ordained to His immediate service, grace, that in the exercise of their ministry they may depend upon God, ever pray for His guidance and blessing, and be instruments of bringing glory to God, and many souls to salvation, through Jesus Christ.

To Whom, &c.

SERMON XC.

PREACHED AT AN ORDINATION.

THE DUTIES OF MINISTERS AND PEOPLE.

1 Cor. iv. 1.

Let a man so account of us as of the ministers of Christ, and stewards of the mysteries of God. Moreover, it is required in stewards that a man be found faithful.

The duties which belong to us as *ministers of Christ,* and *stewards of the mysteries of God,* and to you, as you are the flock committed to our charge, and as we are *over you in the Lord;* these duties are so great, and so necessary to be known and remembered, that one cannot well omit such an occasion as *this,* of repeating, and recommending them to *your* serious consideration, as well as to *our own.*

"Let a man," saith the Apostle, that is, let every Christian, "account of us as the ministers of Christ." *Account of us;* that is, esteem and treat us, not as *their* ministers or servants, but *as the ministers of Christ.* Account of *us,* not only of St. Paul, but of all *the ministers of Christ,* to whom He has promised His Spirit unto the end of the world; for we are *stewards of the mysteries of God;* and, if we are *God's stewards,* you know what follows,—our Lord Himself will tell you: "He that despiseth you, despiseth Me, and God that sent Me." [Matt. 10. 40.]

But then we are not to think, that because we are the *ministers of Christ,* and *God's stewards,* that therefore we may do what we please. No: for *it is required in servants and stewards that a man be found faithful: faithful* to his character, *faithful* to the vows he takes upon him when he enters into his Lord's service; *faithful,* with regard to the *mysteries* with which he is entrusted, to the *Lord* whose ser-

vant he is, and to the *people of the Lord* committed to his care. These are things, Christians, worthy of our most serious consideration.

For if either *we*, or *you*, are wanting to our duty in this respect, the consequence will be sad and dreadful. If *we*, as Christ's ministers, are not *faithful* to our trust, and if *you*, as our charge, are not careful to hear and obey us, for our Master's sake, we must *both* of us expect the wrath of God at the great day of recompence.

I. You shall therefore *first* hear what it is to be *a faithful steward of the mysteries of God;* and then you will see whether as such we ought to be accounted of; that is, thought worthy of esteem.

Now our *first business*, as ministers of Christ, is, to endeavour "to turn men from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan unto God;" that is, to convince all such as are disposed to hear the truth, that *by nature* they are the children of wrath, enemies to God and goodness; that they bring into the world with them *the seeds of all manner of sin and wickedness*, which, if not restrained by the grace of God, will fill them full of all iniquity, and bring them to destruction both of soul and body. [Acts 26. 18.]

They are further to be convinced, that "except a man be born of water, and the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of heaven." That this is what Jesus Christ Himself has declared, to the end that men, being awakened into a sense of the danger they are in while they are *unconverted*, may strive to "recover themselves out of the snare of the devil, who are taken captive by him at his will." [John 3. 5.] 2 Tim. 2. 26.

Now the ordinary means which God makes use of to convert sinners is, *by the ministry of the Word* preached and applied to the consciences of men. "How shall they hear," saith St. Paul, "without a preacher?" And who they are that are commissioned to preach the Word, you will hear from our Lord Himself: "Go ye," saith He, "and teach all nations; and lo! I am with you always, even unto the end of the world." *I am with you*, that is, Jesus Christ is with us, by His Spirit, and by His blessing: with whom? Why, with His Apostles, and their lawful successors, as long as the world shall last. Rom. 10. 14. Matt. 28. 19, 20.

SERM. XC.

This is the first part of our commission as ministers of Christ.

II. The next is, *to baptize your children;* that is, to admit them into the covenant of grace, into the Church of Christ, which is His house and family, by which they are made *members of Christ, children of God,* and *heirs of the kingdom of heaven;* that is, they have hereby a right to call God their Father; they have a right to the forgiveness of their sins upon their true repentance; they have a right to the assistance of God's Holy Spirit, to the ministry and charge of His holy angels, and to the joys of paradise when they die.

They have, I say, a *right* to all these blessings, by being *baptized* by the lawful stewards of the mysteries of God; for this is one of the mysteries committed by Christ to His ministers, and to *them* only. And a *mystery* indeed it is, that so many blessings should be the effects of so ordinary a ceremony, performed by a mortal man like ourselves. But so God has appointed; and we have great reason to be thankful, that our gracious God has given us a right to eternal happiness upon such easy terms. I say *a right;* for we *may* forfeit our title to heaven, if we are not careful to live as becomes the children of God.

III. And this brings us to another duty, and burden upon a minister of Christ; and that is, *to fit your children for confirmation.* For indeed parents, too many of them, are so little concerned for their children's eternal welfare, that the greater part, *even of Christians,* would not know why they came into the world, if the ministers of Christ were not obliged, before they bring persons to be *confirmed,* to take care they be instructed in the necessary knowledge and duties of Christianity; to convince them of the advantage of beginning betimes to be serious, before sin and hell get the dominion over them; to instruct them in the *duties* belonging to them as Christians in every state of life unto which it shall please God to call them; to shew them the *dangers* they are like to meet with, and how to escape them; the *enemies* they have to strive with, and how to overcome them.

Whoever is not instructed in these things does not know what it is to be a Christian; what his duty is in *this* world, nor what will become of him when he dies. And those

parents have a sad account to make, who do not even compel their children to come to be instructed, that being convinced of the necessity either of leading an holy life, or of being for ever undone, they may dedicate themselves to God betimes; that, being under the guidance and protection of His Holy Spirit, they may be secure from fear of evil, while they continue to make use of the means of grace which God has ordained.

IV. For our merciful *Lord*, knowing the weakness of our nature, has appointed certain *outward ordinances*, which if we observe as He has directed, we may certainly depend upon the pardon of our sins, and greater degrees of light to know our duty, and of grace and strength to perform it.

The chief of these ordinances is that of THE LORD'S SUPPER, appointed to keep up the remembrance of Christ's death, by which alone we obtain the forgiveness of our sins.

And this is *another of the mysteries* which Christ has committed to His ministers, to be communicated to all the orderly members of His family. And a very *great charge*, God knows, they have upon them, with regard to *this mystery*, lest, for want of *care* to instruct the *ignorant*, for want of *concern* to admonish the *negligent*, and for want of *courage* to repel the *profane*, they suffer any to eat and drink their own damnation, not considering the Lord's body.

V. And this brings us to consider another duty incumbent upon the ministers of Christ, and that is, *to exercise a godly discipline*, without which the Church of Christ, *which ought to be holy and without blemish*, would become the contempt of unbelievers.

Our duty therefore is, to *rebuke* gainsayers, to reprove all such as hold the truth in unrighteousness, to let careless and obstinate sinners know plainly whither their wicked ways will lead them at the last; and in the meantime, until they shall give tokens of repentance and amendment, to deny them the ordinary means of grace, because they render themselves unworthy of them; and finally, if they continue impenitent, to turn them out of the Church, which is the house of God, that being reduced into the state of *heathens*, without hope, and without promises, they may be awakened

SERM. XC.

into a sense of the danger they are in, and by a timely repentance, recover themselves out of the snare of the devil.

And this, by the way, is the true end of excommunication, and Church discipline, where it is rightly administered. To turn wicked men out of Christ's family, as the prodigal in the Gospel left his father's house, until being forced to feed with swine, and weary of such a life, they may with him remember the blessing of being under the government of a tender father, and with him return with words of sorrow and repentance: "Father, I have sinned against heaven and before thee, and am no more worthy to be called thy son: make me as one of thy hired servants." And then the ministers of Christ, with joyful hearts, and with the compassion of a father, are ready to receive them again into God's household and family. And they have authority from their great Master so to do. "Whatsoever," saith He, "ye shall bind on earth, shall be bound in heaven; and whatsoever ye shall loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven." A power very great indeed; but not too great for God to give, or mortal men, having authority from God, to execute.

Luke 15. 19.

Matt. 18. 18.

And happy it is for sinners, that there is room left for a return (with the prodigal) to their father's house; that there are persons appointed to receive them, and to restore them to the favour of God, which they had forfeited by their disobedience to His laws.

And let men account this a mercy or not; of the ministers of Christ, (who are intrusted with His power,) whether they esteem them or no, this will one day be found true: that such as are, by the just sentence of the ministers of Christ, shut out of His Church, will be shut out of heaven; and such as upon their true repentance are received into the Church, will be received into God's favour. "God," saith St. Paul, "God hath given to us this ministry of reconciliation."

2 Cor. 5. 18.

VI. Pursuant to which, there is *another duty and power* belonging to the ministers of Christ; and this is *a power of absolving penitent sinners.*

All men being subject to *sin;* and to sin unpardoned an awakened conscience being an insupportable burden and torment, our merciful Lord "has given power and com-

mandment to His ministers, to declare and pronounce to His people, being penitent, the absolution and remission of their sins;" that is, they are in the first place to convince men of the nature and danger of sin; and that it can never be forgiven but by a true repentance; then they are to shew them in what true repentance consists; namely, in forsaking of sin, in turning to God, and in bringing forth fruits answerable to amendment of life.

It is then the duty of the minister of Christ to examine whether there appear such marks of a true repentance; and if there do, to absolve him in the name, and by the authority, of Jesus Christ.

It was just thus under the law, with respect to *leprosy*. None could cure that sort inflicted by the hand of God for some great sin, but *God only*. And His priests alone were the judges thereof; that is, when a person was healed, and fit to be received into the congregation of Israel, which was a type or figure of heaven,—as you will find set down at large in the thirteenth chapter of Leviticus.

VII. *Lastly;* the ministers of Christ have another duty incumbent upon them, and that is, to *visit their flocks in the times of sickness and affliction,* to instruct them how to *receive the chastening of the Lord* to their present and eternal advantage; to exhort them to do justice to all men before it be too late; to be charitable both in giving and forgiving; to have a stedfast faith and hope in the promises of the Gospel; and, if their lives have been unblameable, or if by a timely repentance they have forsaken their evil ways, to give them comfortable hopes of salvation; to pray for them, and, if their consciences are burdened, to take their confession, and, upon examining the truth of their repentance, to give them absolution.

These are some of the duties which a minister of Christ is obliged to perform towards his flock, besides the constant duties of *preaching* and offering up daily *prayers* for a blessing upon your *persons,* upon your *labours,* and upon your *children;* for the *pardon* of your sins; for the *graces* you stand in need of; and for your *everlasting happiness.*

VIII. And now let us look back to the text, and to the Apostle's advice: "Let a man so account of us, as of the

SERM. XC.

ministers of Christ;" that is, let all Christians, that have the blessing of a standing ministry, learn to put a just value upon so great a privilege; let them so *account*, that is, esteem of and treat us "as the ministers of Christ and as stewards of the mysteries of God." What *your* duty is towards them that are over you in the Lord, I will shew you in a very few words.

And in the first place take notice, that they are *Christ's ministers*,—they are *God's stewards:* as *such* therefore, they are to be treated: their *advice*, in things relating to their duty, hearkened to; their reproofs taken in good part; their *callings* honoured, and their *persons* respected; ever remembering what St. Paul saith on this occasion: "He that despiseth (the ministers of Christ) despiseth not man, but God." "I beseech you," saith he, in another place, "to know them that are over you in the Lord, and admonish you; and to esteem them very highly in love for their works' sake."

1 Thess. 4. 8.

1 Thess. 5. 12, 13.

But then, secondly, it is your duty, not only to *esteem*, but to *obey* them, in things pertaining to their duty. "If any man," saith our Lord, "neglect to hear the Church, let him be unto thee as an heathen," or as one that believes not in God. And again; "Whosoever shall not receive you, nor hear your words, verily, I say unto you, it shall be more tolerable for Sodom and Gomorrah, in the day of judgment, than for that city." You may judge by the severity of the punishment, what an obligation lies upon all to hear those whom Jesus Christ sends to instruct them.

Matt. 18. 17.

Matt. 10. 14, 15.

Your next duty is, to give them (with a cheerful heart) what their great Master has appointed them; "for so" (saith St. Paul) "has the Lord" (that is, the Lord Jesus) "ordained, that they which preach the Gospel, should live of the Gospel."

[1 Cor. 9. 14.]

And if the law of all Christian nations, pursuant to this ordinance of our Lord, has appointed what proportion every Christian shall contribute towards the maintenance of God's ministers, he will be no gainer at the last, who goes about to defraud them of their dues. It is against *reason* and *justice* to defraud men of that which the law has appointed.

Observation and experience might teach you, how well such dealings have prospered with such as have been making

experiments. And the Scripture is plain: "It is a snare," saith the Wise Man, "to devour that which is holy," or dedicated to God, as all your tithes were before you were born; and God Himself calls it *robbery, to withhold the tithes.* Prov. 20. 25.

It is not for our own sakes that I have put you in mind of these things; for, as St. Paul saith, a dispensation is committed to us, and we must preach the Gospel, whether we live by it or not. But it is for your sakes we tell you these things, that God may bless your labours, as He has promised to do; and that you may not bring a moth and a canker-worm into your barns, which shall secretly devour your increase. "A little leaven leaveneth the whole lump;" a little ill-gotten goods will carry away a greater substance; and "a fire not blown shall consume them;" that is, they shall be consumed, and nobody shall know how. 1 Cor. 5. 6. Job 20. 26.

In short, my brethren, the world is bad enough as it is, but it would be soon much worse, if the good providence of God had not appointed an order of men, and made it their indispensable duty, to preach the Gospel, to offer up the prayers and oblations of the faithful, to praise God for His mercies, and to intercede with Him when He is angry, to warn the unruly, to comfort the feeble-minded, to support the weak, and to be examples to their whole flock.

And because no man on earth is sufficient for these things without the assistance of the Holy Ghost, therefore are they set apart (after the example of the Apostles, and according to the order of the Holy Spirit) by solemn prayer, and by laying on of hands, that a greater grace may accompany them in the discharge of the several parts of their duty. Acts 13. 2, 3.

In one word: God hath appointed His own ministers, by whom He will give mankind those blessings which are necessary to fit them for heaven and happiness. And though of ourselves we are nothing, yet by the grace of God, who sends us, we may be instruments of great good to men.

To sum up what has been said in a few words, that you may remember the better: if we are Christ's ministers, then we are accountable to *Him,* and to Him only, in things pertaining to God. He, and He only, can appoint His own ministers. If we are God's ministers, it behoves us, above

SERM. XC.

all men, to do nothing unworthy the holiness of our characters, that the ministry be not blamed. If we are the more immediate servants of God, then ought we not to seek to please men, nor to confer with flesh and blood, when our Master's service calls for us.

You have seen, Christians, what we bind ourselves to, when we become the ministers of Christ, "to watch for your souls as they that must give an account;" a consideration so dreadful, that it often makes our hearts to ache with fear and sorrow, when you least think of it.

Do not ye therefore add to our burden, (which is great enough, God knows, already,) do not add to our trouble, by despising our authority, which we have from Jesus Christ, for in doing so you will despise Jesus Christ, and God that sent Him. Do not slight our *ministry*, by which, if ever you are, you must be reconciled to God. Do not despise our *persons*, because we are weak men like yourselves, but remember the Lord's word to St. Paul: "My strength is made perfect in weakness." [2 Cor. 12. 9.]

Lastly; do not defraud us of what God has assigned us, lest yourselves be the greatest losers; but rather let both you and we strive in our several places to glorify God.

We, by always remembering the vows that are upon us, using the power which God hath given us for your edification and not for your destruction; and you readily obeying our godly admonitions; that both we and you may at last attain the end of our faith and labours, even the salvation of our souls. Which God grant, for Jesus Christ's sake.

To Whom, &c.

SERMON XCI.

AT THE DEDICATION OF THE NEW CHURCH IN KIRK LONAN.
MARCH 25, 1735.

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2 CHRON. vi. 40.

We have in the prayer of KING SOLOMON, at the DEDICATION OF THE TEMPLE, these words:—*My God! I beseech Thee, let Thine eyes be open, and let Thine ears be attent unto the prayer that is made in this place.*

2 CHRON. vii. 15. We have the gracious answer and promise of God to this petition, in these words: *Mine eyes shall be open, and Mine ears attent unto the prayer that is made in this place.* See Heb. 10 25.

WE all know, that God is every where present to hear the prayers of such as call upon Him in sincerity; but then the holy Scripture teaches us, that He is, in an especial manner, present in the assemblies of the faithful.

"The Lord give thee blessing out of Zion," saith the Psalmist. Why out of Zion? Why because *there* was the temple, the house of God, where His holy angels attended, ascending from thence to carry the prayers of the devout worshippers to the throne of God, and descending to bring down blessings from God, as they are represented in a vision to Jacob at Bethel. [Ps. 128. 5.]

Now, what the temple of Jerusalem was to that nation, the same is every parish Church to us Christians, and it has a right to all the same gracious promises which God did make to the temple of Solomon.

Taking this for granted, we will proceed to consider some truths, which have relation to this subject, and which are not so well understood as they should be; such are these following:—

SERM. XCI.

First; the great blessing of having convenient places for the public worship of God.

Secondly; the great sin of neglecting the public worship; as also the evils and judgments which generally follow such neglect.

Thirdly; the great regard and reverence which Christians ought to have for places dedicated to the honour and service of God.

Fourthly; what their behaviour should be in such holy places.

Fifthly; the great blessing of a regular, settled ministry.

Sixthly; the command of God, that His ministers shall have all just encouragement to discharge their duty cheerfully and faithfully.

And *lastly;* the sin and punishment of those who go about to make void this gracious design of God for the good of His people, as well as for the support of His own ministers.

I. We will first consider, what a *very great blessing it is to have convenient places for the public worship of God.*

When God would shew His love and concern for His own people, He lets them know, *that He will set His tabernacle amongst them;* intimating, that He will always be near them, to hear their prayers, and to help them. [Ezek. 37. 27.]

And when that people fell into sin, and into idolatry, to shew His great displeasure against them, He suffered His temple to be destroyed by heathens, as one of the greatest punishments which could be laid upon them. And so they found it and esteemed it, when once they came to feel the want of it.

Be assured of it, Christians, the public worship of God is an indispensable duty, both with respect to *God's honour,* and *our own greatest interest.*

With respect to the honour of God, it is by this duty that we profess, to all the world, that we are the servants of God; that, therefore, we profess ourselves bound to adore, to honour, and obey Him, after the best and most public manner we are able.

With respect to *ourselves;* as we live and depend upon God's blessing, for our life and health, and for all the good

things that we have or hope for in this world, or in the world to come, He expects that we should beg these blessings in the places dedicated to His honour, as appears plainly from the several promises He has made to Solomon's prayer at the dedication of the temple.

And our Saviour on His part hath promised, that where two or three are gathered together in His name, He will grant their requests,—much more will he answer the prayers which are made *in the great congregation* (as the Psalmist speaks).

They, therefore, who imagine and say, that they can serve God as well at home as at Church, have not considered what we mean by the *public worship;* that it is an open and public acknowledgment of God's glorious perfections, and of our dependence upon Him, of His *power* to help us, of His *justice* to punish us when we do evil, of His *mercy* and *goodness* to pity us.

It is owning to all the world, that we believe what He has revealed in His holy Word there read to us; that we expect to be judged by that Word at the great day; that therefore we fear God, and consequently we may expect that all men, with whom we have to do, may trust us as men fearing God's judgments if we do wrong.

And in good truth, they that seldom or never attend the public worship, can give no sure testimony to the world, that they either *believe* a God or *fear* His judgments; nor do they give any proof to men, that they can be honest upon any true principles of reason or religion.

II. But this is not all. *The sin and evil of neglecting the public worship is very great, with respect to ourselves.*

Christians do not consider, how very apt the very best of us are to forget the duty which we owe to God, to our neighbour, and to ourselves; and that the cares of the world will soon blot out all thoughts of duty.

It pleased God, therefore, from the creation; (for He knew what helps man would want to preserve in his mind the remembrance of his Maker;) it pleased Him to appoint one day in seven to be kept holy; and the neglect of this, in all probability, was the occasion of that great wickedness which brought on the flood upon the world of the ungodly.

SERM. XCI.

The same law continued after the flood; and yet, by the neglect of it, how many nations *now* are there, who though they sprang from one man, who taught his children the knowledge of the true God, yet have, at this day, no remembrance of the Creator of heaven and earth!

The same law, as to the intent of it, is still in force, and the sad effects of neglecting it *are*, and *will always be*, the same. Such as observe it with any degree of seriousness live in the fear of God; while they that despise the *Lord's day, and His ordinances*, are too plainly under the power and government of Satan, who leads them captive at his will.

And it is very observable, that such as come to untimely ends, if they die in their senses, do generally confess, that the beginning of their ruin was the neglect of the public worship, and profaning the Lord's day.

And indeed it cannot be well otherways, if people will not come to Church to be reproved, awakened, and made sensible of what must come hereafter, if they continue to live in sin.

How harsh would it sound to hear a man say, I have nothing to *ask* of God, I have nothing to *thank* Him for, I do not owe Him any service, I can live without His blessing, I desire not the knowledge of His ways. The most careless sinner would tremble to repeat these words; and yet this, in effect, is the language of those that wilfully neglect and despise the public worship of God;—this is the language of their actions, though not of their tongue.

Remember, good Christians, that, as such, you all pretend to be *of the household of faith*. Now, can any of you, with any pretence, say, that you are of the household of faith, when you are seldom or never seen at God's house, and with His family?

Think seriously of this, and you will esteem it the greatest blessing to have Churches to go to, and you will close with every opportunity of going to your Father's house, lest you lose the inheritance of His obedient and dutiful children.

We must not, indeed, charge all people with this sin. A great *unhappy distance from the Church, bad weather, short days, old age, long and difficult ways, ill health*, and the like, very often have hindered even some well-disposed people from going to Church as often as they could wish.

[Several of these hindrances, God be praised for it, are now removed, by this house which we have now dedicated to His service. For it pleased God to put it into the hearts of several well-disposed people, whose zeal ought not to be forgotten, and whose names shall be recorded to posterity, to begin and carry on this good work, obliging themselves, through God's help, to finish it.

May our gracious God remember them all for good; bless their persons, their labours, and their families, and all those who have any way contributed to this good work, and to the glory of God, in building an house to the honour of His Majesty! And may this laudable and uncommon zeal provoke many others to follow their example, where the houses of God are falling into decay, or are too small for their congregations to worship God with decency and devotion.]

III. The next thing we come to consider is, THE GREAT BLESSING OF A REGULAR, SETTLED MINISTRY.

Now, that you may know how to value so great a blessing, and that you may not be tempted by Satan and his agents to despise their persons and their ministry; pray take notice of these following truths of the scripture of God: that God has expressly promised to bless those whom His ministers shall bless in His name. "I will bless them (saith our God), "according to the blessing pronounced over them." Numb. 6. 27.

And that you may not imagine, that this promise belonged to the people of Israel only; I must put you in mind of the words of Jesus Christ our Saviour, when He sent His apostles: "If, in any place you go to, *there be a son of peace,*" that is, any one disposed to receive your doctrine and blessing, "your peace," the blessing of peace, "shall rest upon him; if not, your blessing of peace shall return to you again." Which plainly shews that there is something more than an empty ceremony in the blessing of Christ's ministers. [Luke 10. 6.]

But that which will most effectually convince all that are disposed to be convinced, *of the great blessing of a regular ministry,* will be, to set before you in one short view *the work of a minister of Christ.* You will then see how much they contribute to your salvation.

St. Paul declares expressly, "That God is in Christ recon- 2 Cor. 5. 19.

SERM. XCI.

ciling the world unto Himself; and that He has committed this word of reconciliation unto His ministers."

Let us see in what their ministry consists. And first, as stewards over the house of God, (for so they are called in the Word of God,) their duty as such is, to receive into His household and family all who are desirous and capable of being members thereof: *and this they do by the sacrament of baptism;* which is a blessing that few people of sense and piety are willing to be deprived of, for themselves or their children.

In the next place, the work of the ministry consists *in preaching the Gospel;* that is, in convincing men, that they are sinners, that they stand in need of God's mercy, and of a Redeemer, for that God will call all men to an account, and will judge them according as their works and lives agree with the Gospel, or are contrary to it.

In order to this, they are to exhort Christians to mind their duty, (which they are but too apt to forget,) and to rebuke and to reprove them when they see them careless of their souls; to set before them the terrors of the world to come, on one hand; and, on the other, to set before them the mercies of God, whenever they are truly afflicted with the burden of their sins. Who does not see the great blessing of such a ministration?

But this is not all: Christians are apt to fall into sin after baptism. What must they do to be restored to the favour of God again? Why, Jesus Christ has ordained another sacrament, and has appointed His ministers the dispensers thereof; namely, a sacrament of reconciliation, for all such as with hearty repentance and true faith turn unto God. What a mighty blessing is this for repenting sinners!

Besides this, the ministers of Christ have a daily charge upon them. They stand obliged (as the priests under the law) to offer unto God the concerns and prayers of their several flocks; to confess their own sins and the sins of their people; to give God thanks for the mercies He bestows upon them; and to beg God's protection and blessing upon their persons and their labours. Who does not think this a very great blessing indeed?

In one word; these are *they,* by whose ministry you are

made Christians; to whom the care of your souls is committed. These are they (as the apostle saith) who watch for your souls, as they that must give an account. They are the stewards or dispensers of the mysteries of God to His elect; by whom He instructs them in the truth, feeds them with the bread of life, comforts afflicted souls, absolves the penitent, arms them against the fear of death, and fits them for a blessed eternity.

It is certain, these blessings would be more visible, if every minister of Christ would do what he promises at his ordination; and woe be to them that do not endeavour to do so!

If they would not take upon them to convert others till they themselves were converted; if they would undertake the holy calling out of a true love of God, and for the souls of men; if their sermons were plain and practical, with an eye to the understanding and capacities of those that are to hear them; if they would always read the service, and administer the sacraments, with great seriousness, *doing holy things after an holy manner;* and take care *that the ministry be not blamed,* through any liberties they take: this would convince the world effectually of the great blessing of a standing ministry.

I shall conclude this head with the prophetical declaration and curse of such as despised the priesthood under the law of Moses: and sure the ministers of Jesus Christ are not less the care of God.

In the thirty-third chapter of Deuteronomy, Moses, prophesying of Levi, and the priesthood, hath these remarkable words: "They shall teach Jacob Thy judgments, and Israel Thy law: they shall put incense before Thee, and burnt-sacrifice upon Thine altar. Smite through the loins of them that rise against him, and of them that hate him, that they rise not again;" that is, as one may suppose, that they leave no posterity behind them, as *Korah, Dathan,* and *Abiram,* did not leave any to survive them.

Do not imagine, Christians, that it is for our own sakes, but for yours, that we magnify our office, as the apostle speaks: it is that you may be sensible of the blessing you enjoy, and of the danger of despising the means of salvation.

SERM. XCI.

IV. We come now to consider, *the express command of God, that His ministers should have all just encouragement to discharge their duty with fidelity and cheerfulness.*

An *house of God* supposes, that He has a *family* :—that He has servants and ministers peculiarly belonging to His household, which is His Church.

He took especial care for the support of these under the law; not leaving it to the fickle humours of those for whose benefit they were appointed is minist ers.

St. Paul assures us, that Christ has done the same under
[1 Cor. 9. 14.] the Gospel: "So hath the Lord ordained, that they which preach the Gospel, should live of the Gospel." *So*, that is, (as is plain from what went before,) as the priests under the law had a fixed maintenance appointed by God, so Christ has ordained, that His ministers shall have a settled maintenance for preaching the Gospel.

Now, this was a *tenth* before the law, a *tenth* under the law; and a tenth has been continued under the Gospel, and has been the least that any Christian lawgiver ever made God's part. And this proportion is unchangeable, if either the laws of God or man can make a thing unchangeable. And if Christ's ministers (as it often happens) are forced to take less than God's portion, rather than be continually striving with the people of their flock, woe be to them which take the advantage of such lenity!

God has most solemnly promised His blessing upon the payment of what He has appointed. The words are, as it
Mal. 3 10. were, a challenge to men: "Bring ye all the tithes into the storehouse, and prove me herewith, saith the Lord of hosts, if I will not open you the windows of heaven, and pour you out a blessing, that there shall not be room enough to receive it."

And take notice, it is upon this very account, that the
[Gal. vi. 7.] apostle saith, "God is not mocked;" that is, He will not suffer Himself to be mocked; "for whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he reap."

That God gives, and withholds His blessings, as men and nations deserve, is a truth not to be questioned by those that either read His Word, or observe His providence.

V. We now come, in the last place, to consider, *the great*

regard and reverence which Christians ought to have for places dedicated to the honour and service of God.

And *first*, if you remember that this is the house of God, you will be careful and zealous to keep it in good and decent repair, as ever you expect the favour and blessing of God.

Hear what God Himself declared by His prophet Haggai, [ch. i.] when they neglected to repair His temple: "Ye have sown much and bring in little, and when ye brought it home I did blow upon it; why? saith the Lord of hosts. Why, because of My house which lieth waste, and ye run every one to his own house."

This is very proper to be considered by those who grudge every penny they pay towards the decent repairs of the Church, and very often must be compelled by law even to be kind to themselves.

Our next indispensable duty is, *to go to Church on all such days as are set apart for the public worship of God.* And this every Christian will choose to do, who has any regard either for the honour of God, or for his own salvation.

As to the honour of God, they know little of the nature of true religion, who do not know, that public worship is an homage and duty which all people owe to the Creator of heaven and earth. And it is a shrewd sign of atheism for any man not to give this public testimony of his faith and fear of God. And we may, without breach of charity, conclude, that such people have no concern at all for their salvation.

What a murmuring such people would make, if a sentence of excommunication were denounced against them, though no temporal evils were to follow. And yet, by absenting from Church, they, in effect, lay themselves under that dreadful sentence, and put themselves under the *power of Satan.*

VI. We are next to consider, *what we go to Church for.* Why, even to beg God's pardon for those sins, which, if not forgiven, will most certainly be our everlasting ruin; to beg those graces and helps, without which we can never please God, never go to heaven; and to give God thanks for those mercies, which we have no reason to expect will be continued, when we are so ungrateful as not to acknowledge them.

SERM. XCI.

We are also to hear God's holy will and Word read and preached, which is one of the great means of grace and salvation. And we are, by a public appearance at God's house, to testify our dependence upon God for life, and breath, and all things; and to profess openly, that we are members of His household and family.

But remember, I beseech you, once for all, *that it is no honour done to God, to be acknowledged, adored, and worshipped in the Church, by one who dishonours Him out of it.*

We are now come into the house of God. Pray take notice, that, in the language of the Scripture, we are said to be BEFORE GOD, when we are in His house. This will oblige us to take especial care of our behaviour, during our stay in His house.

[Ps. 95. 2, 6.]

We shall, in the most devout and humble manner and posture, beseech Him to pardon what is past, and to amend what is amiss in us for the time to come. We shall adore the mercy of God, who spares us when we deserve punishment; and in all the duties we perform, we shall shew, by our outward devout behaviour, that our hearts do really go along with our lips, in every thing we ask of God, or say of Him.

We shall consider God as speaking to us by His Word, and by His ministers; and we shall attend to what is spoken, and to our duty told us, with humility and patience.

And lastly; we shall receive the blessing of God pronounced by His own minister, with the greatest devotion and thankfulness, being assured by God Himself, that His blessing shall be upon them that do so: "They shall put My name," saith God, "upon the children of Israel, and I will bless them."

Numb. 6. 27.

That I may leave a greater impression upon your minds of the value of such a blessing, I will rehearse to you the manner of that people receiving it. You will find it in the fifteenth chapter of Ecclesiasticus, at the 20th and 21st verses, in these words: "When they had finished the service, then the priest went down, and lifted up his hands over the whole congregation, to give the blessing of the Lord with his lips; and they bowed themselves down to worship, that they might receive a blessing from the Most High."

With which blessing I shall conclude this whole discourse: "The Lord bless you, and keep you. The Lord make His face to shine upon you, and be gracious unto you. The Lord lift up the light of His countenance upon you, and give you peace evermore." [Numb. 6. 24, &c.]

Now, to Him be glory, dominion, and power, for ever and ever. Amen.

SERMON XCII.

AT THE CONSECRATION OF DOUGLASS CHAPEL.

Exod. xx. 24.

In all places where I record My name, I will come unto thee, and I will bless thee.

Whether we consider the honour we do to God in *dedicating a place to His name,* or the benefit we propose to ourselves, in setting such a decent place apart for God's service, where we hope He will vouchsafe us His more especial presence and blessings; either of these considerations is sufficient to make us very cheerful upon this occasion.

That which I have to say upon this subject shall be very far from lessening your joy; for I shall endeavour to satisfy you in these following particulars:

First; that this ancient promise, of God's especial presence in all places where He records His name, belongs to us as well as to the Jews of old; and that God will meet us here and bless us.

Secondly; I will endeavour to explain to you what we mean by God's especial presence, when He is said to come unto us to such places as are consecrated to His honour and service.

Lastly; I will set before you the blessings we may justly expect from God's presence in this place, and in all other places dedicated to His name.

I. Now, that *this ancient promise belongs to us, as well as to the Jews,* we have the Word of God for it, which will serve instead of a thousand reasons besides.

In Malachi [chap. i. 11.] we have this express prophecy, concerning the Church of God in the days of the Messiah:—

"From the rising of the sun even unto the going down of the same, my name shall be great among the Gentiles; and in every place incense (that is, holy prayers) shall be offered unto my name, and a pure offering."

The meaning of which prophecy is this: The sacrifices and service of the Jews, in whose temple God had recorded His name, became at last unacceptable unto God by reason of their sins, as had been often told them by the prophets. Notwithstanding this, they depended upon God's favour and promises made unto their forefathers; they remembered the testimony which God had given to their temple, when it was first dedicated by Solomon; and by what providences He had caused this temple to be again rebuilt, after it had been destroyed for their idolatry; therefore they were confident that God would not cast off His own people, the children of Abraham. For whom then would He have to serve Him?

This gave occasion to this remarkable prophecy in favour of the Gentiles, by which God declares, that the time was coming, when the temple of Jerusalem should not be the only place of solemn worship, but that in all parts of the world men should offer up incense, and a pure offering, and to that end should dedicate places of worship to the name of the true God.

Which prophecy has been in a great measure already fulfilled; since, in most parts of the habitable world, the Gentiles have been converted to Christianity, and have built Churches to the honour and for the service of God.

And as King Solomon, pursuant to the promise made in the text, did build and dedicate the temple of Jerusalem to the name of God, which work God did most favourably accept of, and it became the only place of worship of the true God for many ages: by virtue of the same promise, *which you see belongs to us,* and in imitation of this prince's piety in this thing, which was so well approved of God, we are here met together *to dedicate this house to God:* depending upon the same gracious promise, expecting the same favourable acceptance, and hoping for the same presence and blessing, as long as this house shall continue; at least as long as we shall continue to deserve so great a mercy.

And have we not all the reason imaginable to depend

SERM. XCII.

upon this, since God has hitherto blessed this undertaking with a success far beyond our expectations? May Almighty God remember all our benefactors for good, and favourably receive our own oblations! May they, and we, and all that have contributed of their substance or their labours towards this pious work, be blessed in all their other lawful undertakings! And may the generations to come long enjoy the benefit of our devotions, and this dedication,—the Lord God dwelling amongst them!

[1 Kings 8. 27.] "But will God indeed dwell with men on the earth? Behold; the heaven, and the heaven of heavens, cannot contain Him; how much less the house which we have built?" These are the words of Solomon; and yet he built a temple for God, and God was pleased to call it *His house*, and to vouchsafe His presence there after an especial manner.

Which brings us to enquire into the meaning of this expression in the text, *I will come unto thee, and I will bless thee.*

Nobody questions, but that God is every where present, to hear the prayers of all that call upon Him in truth and sincerity; but the holy Scriptures teach us to believe and say that God may be, after an especial manner, in some one [Gen. 18. 21.] place; as for instance, He is said to have come down from heaven to see if the wickedness of Sodom was altogether as great as the cry thereof had made it.

In another place, when the children of Israel cried unto [Exod. 3. 8.] God in their affliction, the Lord saith unto Moses, "I am come down to deliver them."

The meaning of such expressions must be *this:* it shall appear that I am among you, by the judgments that I will bring upon the wicked, and by the blessings the righteous shall receive from Me. This is what we mean, when we pray that God may be with ourselves or others; that is, that we, or they, may find by experience, that God sees, and hears, and is ready to help us.

Thus Jacob expressed himself, when he had dedicated *a* Gen. 28. 20. *place for the house of God:* "If God will be with me," if it shall appear that He is with me; "by His keeping me in the way that I go; by giving me bread to eat, and raiment to put on; so that I come again to my father's house in peace; then shall the Lord be my God; and this stone, which I

have set for a pillar, shall be God's house: and of all that Thou shalt give me, I will surely give the tenth unto Thee."

But this is not all that is meant by God's presence with any man, or society of men: He is present with them by His holy angels, to watch over them for good.

Thus Abraham assures his servant, "that God will send His angel before him, and prosper him in his way." Gen. 24. 7.

The same promise God makes expressly to the children of Israel: "Behold, I send an angel before thee, to keep thee in the way, and to bring thee into the place which I have prepared." Exod. 23. 20.

And the Prophet Daniel affirms, that he was delivered from death by an angel of God; as St. Peter was from prison. Thus God is present with His servants in all places. Chap. 6. 22.

But still He is more especially present in the assemblies of the faithful, in places consecrated to His name. For there His holy angels keep their *stations;* there they wait the appointed times of devotion, to defend, to assist, and to comfort, the worshippers of God.

Shall we think that the Patriarch Jacob had that vision related in the 28th chapter of Genesis, for his own instruction only? No, certainly; but to inform and assure succeeding ages, that wherever the house of God is, there the angels of God are ascending and descending, carrying up the prayers of the faithful to heaven, and bringing down blessings to all such as are worthy to receive them.

Agreeable to this doctrine, Josephus[a] the Jew tells us, that a while before the destruction of Jerusalem, a light was seen in the temple, and a voice heard, saying, *Let us leave this place,* —the angels of God forsaking their station there, since God had resolved to suffer that house to be destroyed.

All which is confirmed by the Spirit of God, (1 Cor. xi. 10) where it is said, that women, when they come to the assemblies of the saints, ought, in token of their subjection, to be very decent in their behaviour and apparel, *because of the angels* that are present in such assemblies.

After this, I need not tell you, that this is the doctrine of all Christians from the times of Jesus Christ to this day: that the angels of God are there where the name of God is

[a] [Bell. Jud., lib. vii. cap. 12.]

SERM. XCII.

recorded; that is, in all places dedicated, according to His pleasure, to His service.

And shall we doubt of this, because we do not see those glorious beings with our bodily eyes? This was indeed the case of Elisha's servant, who was soon convinced of his error; for when he saw the city encompassed about with soldiers, he cries out, "Alas, my master, what shall we do?" He saw none to help them; and he believed there was none. But God opened his eyes, "and, behold! the mountain was full of horses and chariots of fire round about Elisha."

2 Kings 6. 15.

Upon the whole then, with good authority we may affirm, that at this time, and in this very place, the angels of God are actually present with us, observing our behaviour, assisting our devotions, rejoicing over every sinner that repenteth, gladly carrying up an account of our piety to the throne of grace, and grieving to see any of us careless, and unconcerned, when it is for our life.

II. And now we come to enquire, *whether all assemblies, where the true God is worshipped, have this privilege of God's especial presence amongst them.*

We can by no means affirm this. The Turks worship the true God after a way of their own invention. The Jews worship the same God we do; and yet, for the present, they are cast off. And even many, that call themselves Christians, assemble to worship the God we adore, who yet have no warrant from the holy Scriptures to expect the presence and blessing of God in their assemblies. And whether such as separate without cause from the regularly established Church, where they live, can depend upon God's presence with them, we must leave it to Him to judge.

But that which more concerns us to know is this: that we may be assured of God's presence and blessing in *our* Churches, and the company and assistances of His holy angels, if we drive them not away by our indecent behaviour.

We have priests and a ministry, established according to the Word of God and the practice of the Church in all ages of Christianity; we have a Church and altar, where the memorial of God's name and love are recorded; we have Sacraments of Christ's appointment, to make, and to keep

us members of His body the Church; we have a reasonable service, and according to God's Word; and we hold communion with all Christian Churches in the world, which have not forsaken the rule of faith and discipline, *the holy Scriptures*. And therefore we do with great assurance depend upon God's presence amongst us and in our assemblies; and expect the blessings we pray for.

III. And now we come to consider, *what those blessings are, which we may justly expect from God's presence in our Churches and Chapels dedicated to His name.*

Here then is the grant which Solomon obtained from God, when he dedicated the temple of Jerusalem: "If there be dearth in the land, if there be pestilence, blasting, or mildew; if the enemy shall besiege them; whatsoever sore, whatsoever sickness there be; then what prayer, or what supplication soever shall be made of any man, or of all the people, when every one shall know his own sore, and his own grief, and shall spread forth his hands in God's house: then will God hear from heaven His dwelling-place, and forgive, and render unto every man according to his works." 2 Chron. 6. 28; 1 Kings 8. 37.

All which blessings Jesus Christ hath obtained for His servants and followers, and they may depend upon them. Therefore, it ought to be looked upon as one of the greatest instances of God's favours to us, that we have places of public worship, where we may have a correspondence with Him, who alone can hear and answer our petitions and wants.

But then, pray observe, that God doth not promise to hear the prayers of all that appear before Him, but of those only *who know their own sore, and their own grief.*

While we think we can help ourselves; while we are not sensible that we want God's help and blessing; while we live as if we neither fear God, nor depend upon Him; while we ask His blessings, as if we cared not whether we received them or not; it is no wonder if God does not regard us.

But if we come to God's house, out of a sense of our dependence upon Him for life, and breath, and all things, out of a sense of our own unworthiness, and inability to help ourselves, out of a sense of the greatness of our sins, and the danger of not having them pardoned; if we come in confidence of God's mercy in Jesus Christ to all that call upon

SERM. XCII.

God in His name, resolving to live up to that measure of knowledge and power which God has given us; then may we be assured, that God will hear us, answer us, and do abundantly more for us than we can ask or think.

Thus you have seen what authority and reason we have for what we are doing, and what cause we have to rejoice in the work we have done. For this is the sum of what I have said:

In all places where the name of God is recorded, according to His will and Word, there God will meet His servants and bless them. How will He meet them? Why, He will order His holy angels to be present at their assemblies, to assist their devotions, to observe their behaviour, to bring up their petitions to the throne of grace, and to carry down the blessings they have rightly prayed for.

Now, it has ever been thought meet, that such places as are designed for this intercourse betwixt God and man should be sanctified by prayer; that is, set apart from common uses. The temple of Jerusalem was so consecrated; and God approved of the action after a most solemn manner.

After this, God declared, (as you have seen,) that in the days of the Messiah, *in all places* (as well as at Jerusalem) *men should offer incense and a pure offering;* and consequently should have places set apart for that service.

When this time came, the apostles of Jesus Christ, and their successors, observed this method as well as the circumstances of time and place would permit; they had their *upper rooms,* often mentioned in the New Testament; they went
Acts 16. 13. to pray in such places, *where prayer was wont to be made;*— they forbad all indecent behaviour in such places. And God
1 Cor. 11. visited the Christians for their taking the same liberties in His house that they took in their own.

And people are commanded to come to such places with reverence and decency, *because of the angels of God,* which are there present.

And lastly; here we are assured God will meet us, and give us the blessings we want and pray for: for we are the offspring of those Gentiles to whom the prophecy belongs.

We have called this place by *His name;* we have prayed

Him to vouchsafe us His presence; we resolve to offer Him no oblation or service, but such as He has commanded.

Why then should we despair of being favourably received? Only let us resolve and live like people who have the Lord for their God; then will God pour down His blessings upon us, and we shall be safe under His protection here, and hereafter dwell with Him for ever.

And now, having endeavoured to make you sensible of the reason and advantage of having a house set apart for the honour and service of God, where we may pay our devotions, and be sure to be heard, if it is not our own faults; it will be proper to consider the duty of people who enjoy such a blessing.

And *first*, it is our duty to possess our hearts with a true value for the benefit of the Divine presence dwelling among us.

The way to do this is, to consider the condition of our being; that we are creatures whose dependence is entirely upon God, for life, for health of body, for peace of mind, for comfort in this world, and happiness in the next. That it is therefore necessary, at all times, to apply to Him for these blessings, and to preserve His friendship by frequenting His house.

It is true, He makes His sun to shine upon the evil and the good; and we must not judge of our interest in His favour, by those outward dispensations only. And therefore these are not the things that we are to set our hearts upon, and pray for, in the first place.

But that which sure concerns us all to know and consider is this: that we are sinful creatures, and without God's pardon we are undone for ever; that we have many and powerful enemies, and without God's succour we are sure to be overcome; that we are extremely corrupted both in our understandings and affections, and without God's grace we can neither know nor perform our duty; that the happiness of heaven (which we all hope for) is not to be obtained but in keeping the commandments of God, and in communion with His Church.

He that considers these things will value the blessing of having God's house near him, where he can go for pardon

SERM. XCII.

when he has offended God; where he can go for help and grace, which he always stands in need of; and where he can hold a constant and open communion with the Church of Christ, and by that means can claim a share, and a right, in all the blessings *there* prayed for, in all the promises of Christ made to His Church, and in all the mercies He vouchsafes her.

From hence you may learn how careful Christians should be *not to be guilty of such crimes as will deprive them of holding communion with the Church of Christ.*

It is not every body that considers it, and yet every body ought to know it, that whoever is for his offences hindered from coming to the Sacrament, is in a state of damnation while he continues so, and does not endeavour by a true, humble, and sincere penance, to obtain absolution.

This is a thing so true, and a matter of so great concern, that St. Paul, in his letter to Timothy, charges him, before God, and our Lord Jesus Christ, and the elect angels, openly to rebuke such sinners, that others may take warning, and see, and fear, and do no more wickedly.

1 Tim. 5. 20, 21.

Do we think that people in those days were not as subject to shame, and to like passions with us? Do not we think that they knew as well as we do, whether Church censures might be safely neglected or excused by friends or any other way? And yet we find that Christians then, even when there was no law to compel them, submitted to any censure in hopes of being restored to the communion of the Church; which, by the way, was a mighty proof of the truth and power of Christianity.

It had been easy for offenders then to have escaped penance, and to have been revenged, if they had pleased, on those that censured them; they would have been rewarded for discovering the assemblies and pastors of the faithful; and yet they submitted to those very persons whom they had it in their power to ruin, forced thereto by the power of God, and the terrors of the world to come.

But God knows, there are more ways of being out of this blessed communion besides by Church censures.

If people will neglect the holy Sacrament, and the assemblies of the faithful; if they will live in secret, but wilful

sin, they are out of communion without the censures of the Church; and by that means, they are without hopes, without promises, and live without God in the world.

But it is not only our duty, and our interest, to hold communion with the Church of God, by frequenting its assemblies; but it is our duty in an especial manner, to take care how we behave ourselves there.

If the angels attend the worshippers of God, if we believe that they are indeed amongst us, how very careful should we be to behave ourselves with great decency and devotion, lest they, beholding our indifferency and slothfulness, even when our salvation is at stake, forsake our churches, return to heaven, and there report, that of a truth, the fear of God is not amongst us.

Rather let us consider, how it is we behave ourselves when any of us are to ask a favour of our betters: that we consider what we are going about; that we come before, and speak to them with great respect; that we patiently wait *their* time and pleasure; that we receive their favours with thankfulness; that we observe very diligently the commands they give us; and lastly, that we leave their presence with thankful hearts, and cheerful countenances; and that we do all this naturally, and without needing any body to tell us, that it is fit we should so behave ourselves.

And now, must it not argue great negligence, or a very profane disposition of heart, that when God is present with us, by His holy angels; when we are asking His pardon, praying for His favours, desiring that His judgments may not overtake us, which we have justly deserved; we do all this with as much carelessness and indevotion, as if we were sure God saw us not, or as if we cared not for it, though He did.

But people that are serious, and well instructed, will not behave themselves so, when they appear before God.

They will consider what in reason is expected from them; they will think that it is not without grounds, that almost all nations and religions do shew some reverence when they enter into their temples.

And, above all, they will remember, that God has expressly commanded His worshippers to *reverence His sanctuary;* to look to their feet, (that is, to approach with reve- [Lev. 19. 30.]

SERM. XCII.

rence His glorious presence,) when they go to the house of God.

And when they offer their sacrifice of prayer and thanksgiving, they will take care it shall not be the *sacrifice of fools*, who think they have done all that is commanded or expected from them, when they have been at the house of God.

But thoughtful and good people will consider, that they come to Church to pray for pardon, having broken the commandments of God, and therefore they ought not to break them as soon as they leave God's house. They consider, that hither they come to pray for grace to enable them to know and to do their duty; that therefore they are bound to live up to what they know, and are enabled to do. They consider, that when they have been praising God at His house, it will by no means become them to dishonour Him abroad, in their lives and conversations. And these are the people we should imitate.

Thus far I have kept close to my subject: and I hope I do not go from it, when I put you in mind of your duty to those whom God has appointed *His* ministers in all places where He records His name.

Is it not an unaccountable thing, that people shall pretend to be thankful to God that they are Christians, and yet shall be well pleased to see that order of men despised, by whose hands they were received into the Church of Christ?

Rather learn to honour them as they are your betters, not as men, but as priests of the most high God.

Attend to what they preach; join with them devoutly when they pray; slight not their reproofs; despise not their absolution and blessing.

Do this for God's sake, and your own, that you may hold communion with Jesus Christ, with the holy angels, with the saints on earth, and those in heaven.

But then, if such an order of men are necessary to keep up this communion and friendship betwixt God and His worshippers, how worthily should such persons behave themselves in the Church of God? How blameless, how holy, how industrious, should they be, that they may not only stop the mouths of gainsayers, but be living examples of all the virtues they recommend to others!

Thus much I thought fit to say to all Christians in general that are met together upon this occasion.

I have but one word to add to *you*, that are like to receive the greatest benefit by the building and dedicating this goodly structure.

You have built, and it is now consecrated, a convenient and decent place of worship; it will very much increase your guilt, if you neglect to attend the service of God, as often as it is here performed.

If the angels of God attend here to bring your prayers before God, will any of you be indifferent, whether or no you come hither? Will you dare to spend the Lord's day, without just cause, at home, when the angels are here to meet you? Will you let your children be exposed to judgments and dangers, by suffering them to be idle and to play at home, when their angels (which, our Saviour saith, see the face of God) are in the congregation of the faithful? Will not all those, that are without reason elsewhere, be exposed to the power of the devil, without a helper?

I beseech you, that this house of God may not be a snare and a cause of increasing your guilt and misery. But that you may attend the service of God hereafter to be performed in it; and after such a manner as shall evidently shew, you consider where you are, and what you are doing.

I have shewn you very particularly, that all things conspire to make you careful of your thoughts, and words, and actions, whenever hereafter you enter this place.

All things conspire to drive away profaneness and negligence:

The presence of the angels of God, the use and service this house is now set apart for, the business which brings us hither, the blessings we may expect to meet with here, and the danger of departing from God's house with a curse instead of a blessing.

And now, O God, we most humbly beseech Thee, since Thy name is recorded in this place, let Thine eyes be open, and Thy ears attent unto the prayers that shall be made in it.

May the inhabitants of this town never provoke Thee, by any wickedness, to withdraw Thy presence from this house,

SERM. XCII.

which we have dedicated to Thy honour; but may they, in all their necessities, have this place to flee unto, this house of defence nigh at hand.

May Thy sabbaths be here remembered, and devoutly kept; may Thy sacraments be here administered and received with great devotion; may the youth be instructed, the aged put in mind of their duty, and all made living temples of the Holy Ghost! that Thou mayest bless us, and that we in return may honour Thee, "for Thou art worthy, O Lord, to receive honour, and glory, and power; for Thou hast created all things, and for Thy pleasure they are, and were created."

[Rev. 4. 11.]

"Glory be to God on high, and on earth peace, good-will towards men," for ever and ever.

[Luke 2. 14.]

SERMON XCIII.

PREACHED AT A PUBLIC PENANCE.

THE POWER OF GOD'S MINISTERS TO REBUKE SINNERS AND RECEIVE THEM ON REPENTANCE.

Josh. vii. 19, 20.

And Joshua said unto Achan, My son, give, I pray thee, glory to the Lord God of Israel, and make confession unto Him; and tell me now what thou hast done: hide it not from me. And Achan answered Joshua, and said, Indeed I have sinned against the Lord God of Israel, and thus and thus have I done.

The very text I have chosen, (the occasion of which you may see at your leisure,) the *text*, I say, teacheth us after what manner we ought to treat such as have fallen into any grievous sins, in order to bring them to a sense of their error.

My son, saith Joshua, the prince and leader of the people of Israel; *My son!*—to a man who for his sin had deserved and was immediately put to death.

And shall not we, with the same tenderness, and with greater, if it be possible, receive the confession of one of our fellow-Christians, who professeth, *and we hope sincerely*, to turn from his evil ways?

What passions other people have upon such occasions as these, I cannot tell; but for myself, I profess, so many mortifying and sorrowful thoughts come into my heart at such times as these, that those who undergo the shame of *public penance* scarce suffer more than I do, who have inflicted it. I consider myself as one, subject to the same *infirmities*, the

SERM. XCIII.

same *temptations*, and the same *dangers*, with those that have fallen; and that it is owing to the mere mercy of God, and not to my own wisdom, or strength, or holiness, that sin and hell have not got the dominion over me.

Such a sorrowful occasion as this even forces one to remember every man his own failings, which have been enough to have provoked God to have given the very best of us up to our own heart's lusts, *but that God is gracious and merciful, long-suffering, forgiving iniquity and transgression.*

[Exod. 34. 6, 7.]

Add to this, that as we are Christians, and all of one body, *the Church;* one member cannot suffer, but all the members must suffer with it.

We have a notable instance, in this very chapter, (of which the text is a part,) to what judgments a whole Church and people are liable for the transgressions of particular persons, *until the crimes are confessed and punished.*

The children of Israel are beaten by their enemies; their leader rends his clothes; the elders of Israel are under great sorrow and confusion, and know not which way to turn themselves for help; and all this, because of *one* man who had sinned, who had broken the command of God.

1 Cor. 5. 2.

It was for this reason, amongst others, that St. Paul so sharply blames the Corinthians, that they had not bewailed the incestuous person, who had not only given scandal to all sober Christians, but would be a curse to them if he was not put away from among them. So that as no man is safe while notorious sins are unpunished, so in truth no good man can be unconcerned when such punishments are inflicted by the governors of the Church.

But we, that are God's ministers, have still greater reason to be very sensibly affected, when we consider, that perhaps it is for some *fault of ours*, some great *neglect* of *our* duty; and that it is to reprove *us*, that God has suffered any of our flock to fall into such dangerous and repeated crimes.

All these things laid together, you will all be satisfied, as well as I am, that tears will become the very best of us upon these occasions, and that every one for himself, *as well as for this our brother*, ought with penitent hearts, and humble spirits, to smite our breasts, and say, *God be merciful unto us miserable sinners.*

And oh! that I could speak upon this *sad occasion*, and you would so seriously attend to what I say, that by the favour of God, we might, for the future, have fewer instances of the wickednesses we are subject to, when God gives any of us up to ourselves, for the hardness of our hearts.

"My son, give, I pray thee, glory to the Lord God of Israel, and make confession unto Him; and tell me now what thou hast done, hide it not from me."

From this exhortation we learn, *first*, that when any man has done foolishly, and broken the commands of God, the greatest glory he can give to God, and the only amends he can make, is to confess his fault, not only to God, but (where scandal has been given) unto man also.

"And Achan answered Joshua, and said, Indeed I have sinned against the Lord God of Israel, and thus and thus have I done."

From this humble and ready confession (even where his life was at stake) we may learn, *secondly*, that when a man's conscience is truly awake, and well informed, he will not scruple to confess his fault, and take shame to himself.

And these are the two things that I shall endeavour to convince you of in the discourse I am now going to make to you, which I pray God give His blessing to.

I. And first, I will shew you *how we are said to glorify God in the public confession of our crimes.*

We all profess to believe that *God is Almighty*, that He can do whatever He pleaseth; which belief ought in all reason to keep us from offending Him by breaking His laws; for, "by the fear of the Lord," (saith the Wise Man,) "men depart from evil." [Prov. 16. 6.] And whom shall we fear, if we fear not Him *who can destroy both body and soul in hell?*

But notwithstanding we *all* profess to believe the Almighty power of God, there are but too many who live without any fear of God in their hearts.

Now, when a sinner, struck with a sense of his guilt, and the terrors of the world to come, freely professeth that he fears the mighty power of God, and that God can punish him both in this world, and in the next, though he should escape in this; when this fear forceth him to confess those crimes, which otherwise he would be ashamed and afraid to

SERM. XCIII.

own; this is proper to convince all that hear and see him, *that God is indeed great, and greatly to be feared.*

And God *is glorified* by such a confession, and men are made more careful, and fearful of offending against His Almighty power, while they see the greatest sinners humbling themselves before His Majesty; professing themselves overcome and conquered, and their stubborn hearts subdued by the *fear of the Lord.*

Secondly; we give glory to God, by confessing His *infinite knowledge,* and that nothing is hid from Him. When men are about to commit *works of darkness,* they hope such deeds will never come to light; and yet all the care they can take to conceal their crimes only serves to convince them, (if they have any grace,) that there is no *place* so secret, no *contrivance* so cunning, no *night* so dark, no *corner* so remote, but where the eye of the Lord is present, to bring to light the hidden things of darkness: *and that all things are naked and open unto the eyes of Him with whom we have to do.* When sinners, (I say,) after all their pains to conceal their crimes, are forced to own this, others will be apt to glorify God, and to acknowledge, with holy Job, "that His eyes are upon the ways of man, and that He understandeth all his goings."

[Heb. 4. 13.]

Chap. 34. 21.

Thirdly; sinners glorify God when they confess His *justice* in bringing upon them that shame, those punishments, those sorrows, which they have justly deserved; so that as men shall have reason to say, *verily, there is a reward for the righteous;* so shall they be forced to own, *verily, there is a God that judgeth the world.*

[Ps. 58. 11.]

Fourthly; they that confess their faults, and turn from their evil ways, *do glorify God,* in acknowledging the *wisdom* of God, and the *goodness* of His laws. They have found by sad experience, and they freely confess it, that there is no solid happiness to be found in the ways of impiety; and that when men forsake the ways of God, they forsake their own happiness. And when we own this to the world, others will conclude, that however bewitching some sins may be, yet they are to be abhorred, forasmuch as bitterness will be the end of them, and sorrow, at the best, their reward.

Lastly; we give glory to God in confessing and forsaking our sins, inasmuch as we shew the power of faith in His

promises. For who could leave the pleasures of sin, though they are but for a season? Who could prevail with himself to despise the present temptations of a naughty world, to which he has been long accustomed, but by the power of faith; by which he sees, and is persuaded, that the blessedness of the world to come is not to be forfeited for some short and foolish pleasure he may meet with in this life; and by which faith he is verily persuaded, that God will forgive, and receive, and bless with eternal happiness, all such as with hearty repentance turn unto Him, through faith in Jesus Christ.

Thus you see, that every one that repenteth, and confesseth his faults, by doing so, *giveth glory to God:* and this is the best amends that a sinner can make; and this too is matter of the greatest comfort to sinners, who would otherwise despair of mercy, but that it is for the glory of God that they repent and turn from their evil ways.

But, after all, *the greatest glory we can give to God,* is, to live in obedience to His laws, to avoid all scandalous sins, and the temptations that lead to them.

And here let me, for God's sake, prevail with all that now hear me, to take up serious resolutions of living more soberly and circumspectly for the time to come. Will people never take warning, by the misfortunes of others, to prevent their own?

How many good estates have been squandered and come to nothing, by the idleness and intemperance of their owners! How many hopeful people have been corrupted by keeping base and unworthy company! How many base blots have been brought into worthy families, by persons indulging themselves, in drunkenness first, and then in whoredom!

But it were well if this were all: for how many souls have not we reason to fear have been lost, by people's giving themselves up to voluptuousness; who, because God has given them estates, think they have a right to do with them what they please, though to the dishonour of God their benefactor!

I do the more earnestly press this upon you, because I am persuaded, that company-keeping, and tippling, is the very beginning of most men's misfortunes; it is this which

SERM. XCIII.

makes men very often to prefer an ale-house to the house of God; it is this which provokes God to leave men very often to themselves, and their own heart's lusts; it is this which insensibly sinks the best estates, and crumbles them into pieces; lastly, it is this vice which is generally the occasion of, and is for the most part offered as an excuse for, the most scandalous crimes.

Good God! what a pass is religion come to, when those very sins, which the Word of God declares will shut men for ever out of heaven, are looked upon as no crimes!

I will not reckon up some other vile things which this sin has led others into, because I would hope that seasonable reproof will not always be lost upon men who are otherwise of good understanding: but this I must add, that we are all by nature so subject to temptations, to sin, and to misfortunes, that a man had need to have his reason and his senses always about him, to prevent his misery and shame in this world, and, in the world to come, eternal damnation; especially when we consider, that the good Spirit of God, and His holy angels, can never delight to attend, and to protect, such as are given to this vice. They are not fit company for good men, much less for good angels.

I dare appeal to all that hear me, let them but call themselves to an account, and they will find, that drinking and intemperance have led them into the greatest crimes they have fallen into. And, indeed, when a man is in drink, no one can answer for him what he will attempt before he returns to his reason and right mind.

But though he should recover his senses without hurting his neighbour, without prejudicing his estate, and it may be his health too, yet he has one sin more to answer for; and every Christian man ought to know that his soul, which lies at stake, is of more concern to him than all other considerations.

I will add no more now upon this head, because I would hope that people of thought and modesty will lay it to heart; and my design is not so much to upbraid men, as to endeavour to amend what I find amiss.

II. I come now to the second head of my discourse, viz. *that when a man's conscience is truly awake, and well in-*

formed, he will not scruple to confess his sins, and take shame to himself. "Be not ashamed when it concerneth thy soul," was the advice of a Wise Man. Ecclus. 4. 20.

If any thing concerns a man's soul, the bringing him to a sense of his errors, the persuading him to give glory to God in an humble confession of them, the making him an example of repentance to others, does certainly concern the soul of every one who has fallen into any grievous sins. And yet how few are there, who do, out of choice, take this way (when there is scarce any other) of appeasing the anger of God! And how many are there who will venture their souls, rather than cheerfully submit to the wholesome discipline of the Church of Christ? What strange unthoughtfulness is this!

A man that sins without blushing will yet pretend to be ashamed to do penance; he will not scruple to offend God, but he thinks it too much to let the world know that he is sorry for it. But then we are sure that such a man's conscience is neither well *informed*, nor well *awake*. For a man that believes the Gospel will hardly imagine that the hiding or the disowning his sins in this world will make his account *the less hereafter*.

Now, this being a matter of great concern to the souls of men, it will become me to be very plain and particular upon this head of *Church censures*, and the necessity there lies upon all who have deserved them of submitting to them out of a *principle of conscience*, and not out of a fear of *fines* or *imprisonments*. And I am the more obliged to do this, because this matter is not well understood by many, and not well received by most, who should understand better things.

And in the first place, St. Paul saith expressly, "that the governors of the Church have a power from Christ;" what this power is, we learn from other places of the Scripture. First, it is a spiritual power: the princes of the Gentiles exercise authority over them, (saith Christ,) but it shall not be so among you. Your authority shall be purely spiritual; a spiritual house, as the Church of Christ is called by St. Peter, must have spiritual governors. 2 Cor. 13. 10. Matt. 20. 25, 26. 1 Pet. 2. 5.

And their *power*, as is plain from the Gospel, consists in these following particulars: they are to receive into the house or Church of God, such as are fit to be members

SERM. XCIII.

of so holy a society. For this end they had the keys of the kingdom of heaven (that is, of the Church of Christ) given them, to admit such as are worthy and desirous to enter into it.

After this, their *duty* is (for they have a duty and burden as well as a power), their *duty* is, to teach and to exhort with wholesome doctrine; to tell men what they ought to do to be saved; to pray for the souls committed to their charge; to support, and to comfort the weak; to offer to God the oblations of the people; and to administer those sacraments, without which we cannot hope to be saved.

Besides these parts of their office, they have power given them by Christ, who well foresaw, that many would embrace Christianity who would afterwards be a scandal to it; He therefore gave the governors of His Church power, after they have *rebuked, admonished, withstood* the disobedient and profane, to cast them out of His family, the Church; with this assurance, that whatever they did on earth in the way of their duty, should be made good in heaven.

Matt. 18. 18.

In the time of the apostles, and a long time after, Christians were so far convinced of this, that sinners durst not live in disobedience to their spiritual pastors, in matters relating to their spiritual welfare; though there was then no law to punish them for such contempt. Nay, the laws and government then encouraged men to despise and resist their spiritual guides, whom they punished with imprisonment, fines, and death. And yet Christians were more afraid of their censures then, than now men are of imprisonment.

An instance we have, in the fifth chapter of St. Paul's first Epistle to the Corinthians, of this submission. A man who had embraced Christianity, led by his former lusts, would needs marry his father's widow. He was censured for this fault, and turned out of the Church; he had no dependence in the world upon them that did this; all that they could do was to represent to him the dangerous condition into which he had brought himself; and, if he had pleased, he might have despised their counsel, and taken his own ways. But observe what he did; he was so well satisfied that what his spiritual governors had done would most certainly shut him out of heaven, and that whilst he was out of the Church he

was out of the way of salvation, that he falls into a deep sorrow for his sin, submits himself to the orders of the Church; and the governors of the Church, being satisfied with his penitence, received him again into their society, where he might perfect his repentance; absolved, and comforted him. 2 Cor. 2. to ver. 10.

Now, what is it could prevail with men to submit to persons, who to the eye of the world had no manner of authority over them, but that all Christians were then satisfied, that no man had a share in the blessings which Christ had purchased to His Church, but such as submitted to the lawful governors of His Church, in things spiritual? Pray consider, from whom do you receive baptism? From whom do you receive the Lord's Supper? From whom do you receive instruction to life eternal?

And are not *we* as much the ministers of Christ when we rebuke and censure the wicked, and turn out the obstinate and profane, as when we baptize and receive men into Christ's Church, as when we pray for, instruct, and comfort, the faithful? And will not Jesus Christ hear us, and confirm our sentence, as well as hear our prayer?

For God's sake, be not so perverse as to think otherwise.

We profess to have no power given us by Christ, *but for your edification;* that is, to build, and to establish you in godliness.

We pretend not to any power to *lord it over God's heritage;* [1 Pet. 5. 3.] but this is the power we have from Christ: *to rebuke,* and that with authority, as very well knowing that God will warrant us in what we do in His name, and for His honour.

We have power to deny the sacraments to all such as render themselves unworthy of them.

We have power to shut men that are obstinately wicked out of the Church, that they may no longer scandalize the Christian profession; and to charge all other Christians not to accompany with them. And those that will not obey do not reject our authority, but the authority of Christ.

Lastly: we have power to receive the penitent, to absolve, and to comfort them.

And the same Lord, who gives us this power, gives all penitents, who submit to it, an assurance that they may

SERM. XCIII.

depend upon what we do in His name. "Whatsoever ye loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven." "Whosesoever sins ye remit, they are remitted unto them."

[Matt. 18. 18; John 20. 23.]

And now, though many people, for want of knowing these truths, (though they are all Scripture truths,) and though many, out of a profane and worldly spirit, do set at nought and make light of Church censures; and though too many, God knows, submit to them out of fear of the temporal laws only, and not out of submission to Jesus Christ, and obedience to His ministers; yet, as sure as any thing we preach is true, this is true: that they who have been guilty of any scandalous crimes, and do not repent, and openly, if required, confess their sin and their sorrow for having done despite to the grace of God, for having broken their baptismal vow, for having brought a scandal upon their holy religion; such persons have no hopes of mercy and pardon from God.

And those who find ways to escape the censures of the Church, by leaving their place of abode, or their country, by prevailing with officers, whose duty it is to present them, to pass them by, or by any other way, such persons are in the same sad condition; they are exposed to the wrath of God, and no man can promise them any hopes of pardon without public acknowledgment of their crime, and such as the Church appoints.

On the other hand: all such who have had the misfortune to fall grievously, and come to be truly humbled by their offences, and submit to take shame to themselves, and to give glory to God in a free confession of their crimes; acknowledging that God is more to be feared than all other powers on earth, and His judgments dreaded more than death (which is truly giving glory to God); whoever does this in sincerity may be confident that the absolution he receives here will most certainly be confirmed in heaven.

From all which you may see, that if the ministers of Christ's kingdom should neglect their duty, and should forbear to call notorious offenders to public penance; though they should (which God forbid) be partial, and favour some for their own, or for their friends' sake, or for the place they bear in the world; yet this would indeed be no favour at the last, unless we shall think it an advantage to avoid that

shame in this life, which we have justly deserved, to meet with shame, and misery, and confusion of face, for ever and ever, in the next world.

Shame and *sorrow* are the due reward of our sins, and we must suffer them either here or hereafter. And we know that those that have found ways to avoid the censures of the Church, and the shame and affliction that attend them, have visibly been given up to bring double shame and sorrow upon themselves in this life, that their souls might be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus.

It was a just sense of this which has ever prevailed with wise men, when they have fallen into any grievous crime, not only to submit with patience, and great meekness, to the judgment of their spiritual governors, but even to desire to be made public examples, that they might obtain the prayers of all good Christians, that they might receive absolution, and have one of the greatest comforts and assurances which Christ has given to His Church.

They did not look upon themselves, nor did ever any good Christian look upon them as worse, but in a much better and happier condition, for having submitted to shame for the glory of God.

And I hope a time will come, when all Christians will have the same thoughts of the discipline of the Church; which God grant in His own good time!

In the mean time, we must not neglect to tell you the truth, whether you receive it or not; for what is it we get by your obedience, but only the blessing of being instrumental in saving your souls? We desire not to lord it over your consciences; we desire you to submit to the laws of Jesus Christ, not to any rules of ours, which He has not plainly warranted; in one word we only desire to be helpers forward of your salvation, which you all hope for, as well as we.

To conclude: it is to be hoped, that all such as submit to do penance, submit out of a principle of conscience, and in hopes thereby to find God, for Christ's sake, more favourable to them.

But because we are but too apt to deceive ourselves, I must add further, (for the sake of all such unhappy people as do things worthy of public penance,) that their submission and

SERM. XCIII.

outward tokens of sorrow will not be accepted as any amends for their crimes, unless it proceed from an humble and contrite heart.

Hear how the penitent in the text speaks: "And Achan answered Joshua, and said unto him, indeed I have sinned against the Lord God of Israel, and thus and thus have I done."

This humble confession shews, that it came from his very heart; and the danger he exposed himself to by making it shews, that he feared the sentence and judgments of God more than either shame or death.

We have no power to inflict such punishment, nor any temporal evil; therefore we had need to be more earnest with penitents, not to deceive the Church or themselves with false appearances.

People may submit out of fear, and forget all their promises of amendment when that is over; but then they forget their own souls.

Penance is designed to make men better; and if it does not do that, it were better it had never been performed.

If an inward change of heart, and an outward reformation of manners, do not follow, all your promises are lies, and all your sorrow is vile hypocrisy.

And therefore a person that has any fear of God in his heart, after he has humbly confessed his fault; begged God's pardon for having done dishonour to His authority; asked forgiveness of the people; obtained absolution from the priest, the minister of Christ; he will, from that day forward, resolve to live more circumspectly; pray constantly to God for grace, without which we can do nothing; attend the Church and service of God duly; avoid all temptations to impiety, and especially drunkenness, which makes way for all manner of villainies; and if he falls into any one sin, he will immediately repent and forsake it, that it may not make way for a greater.

And he that does so will have great reason to bless God that he has had his lot in a part of the Catholic Church, where the discipline is kept up, the censures executed, and sin openly as well as in private rebuked.

And all wise and good men will be so far from despising

those that thus humble themselves, that they will receive them with open arms, and esteem them the better, as the father did his prodigal son.

And now, I pray you all to join with me in these petitions, that God of His goodness would be pleased to continue to this part of Christ's Church, the power and the spirit of discipline; that He would restore godly discipline to all Christian Churches; and that He would vouchsafe unto all that are engaged in sinful courses, a true sense of their errors, true sorrow and repentance for them, and His gracious pardon, that God may be glorified in their confession, amendment, and salvation, for Jesus Christ's sake.

To Whom, with the Father and the Holy Ghost, be all honour, thanksgiving, and praise, now and for ever.

SERMON XCIV.

A FUNERAL DISCOURSE.

THE CONSIDERATION OF DEATH PUT INTO PRACTICE.

O Lord of life and death, dispose by Thy grace, all that shall hear this discourse, that, remembering our sentence is already passed, our whole lives may be a worthy preparation for death. Deliver every soul of us from the blindness of trusting to a death-bed repentance. Let me not speak to others upon this serious subject, and forget it myself. And when this sentence shall be executed upon me, be Thou, O Jesu, my mighty Protector.

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2 Kings xx. 1.

Thus saith the Lord, set thine house in order, for thou shalt die, and not live.

See Job 14. 5; Ps. 39. 4; 89. 48; 90. 12; Matt. 10. 28; Mark 8. 36; Rom. 5. 12; 1 Cor. 7. 29; 15. 56; 2 Cor. 4. 17; Heb. 9. 27; 13. 14; 1 Pet. 2. 11.

Good Christians; I take this occasion, when most people *are*, or *should be*, serious, to speak to you upon the most serious subject in the world, and a subject which concerns every soul of us, as much as our life is worth.

I would desire you, and I would charge it upon myself, to consider seriously, WHAT IT IS TO DIE, and WHAT PREPARATION IS NECESSARY FOR AN HAPPY DEATH. For sure we need not be told, that if death surpriseth any man before he be *prepared* for it, "it had been better for that man if he had never been born."

[Matt. 26. 24.]

The text I have made choice of is a message sent by the Prophet Isaiah to King Hezekiah: "Thus saith the Lord, set thine house in order, for thou shalt die, and not live."

We little think of it, and yet indeed this very sentence is already passed upon every one of us. It is true, we know not when it will be executed, but executed it *will* be, and that in a very short while.

It behoves us, therefore, to be prepared for it; "to set our house in order," while we have time, while we are in our right mind, and have our senses and thoughts about us; always remembering, that it will be no proper time, when we come to die, to ask this question, "What must I do to be saved?" [Acts 16. 30.]

The Spirit of God has already told us *this:* "Pass the time of your sojourning here," that is, your whole life, "in fear," with a great concern for what must become of you when you die. [1 Pet. 1. 17.]

That we may all do this more effectually, I will set before you,

First; *what our condition and business in the world is.*

Secondly; *what alteration death will make in our condition.*

Thirdly; *what preparation for death will be necessary, to make our life easy, and our death happy.*

Lastly; I will set before you *the different thoughts and reflections of dying persons, both of good and bad,* that we may be warned betimes, what to choose, and what to avoid.

I. And *first,* we shall consider, *what our condition and business in this world is.*

As for our condition; we are by nature born in sin; and subject to the punishment of sin, which is misery and death.

This punishment and sentence we cannot hope to avoid, it being passed upon us by a most righteous judge, and never to be reversed. Yet this comfort we have still left us, that God has been so good, for His Son's sake, as to make a further trial of us, and to place us in this world in a state of probation, in order to try our obedience, and to mend our nature. And has given us this assurance, that if, during this short life, we give such proof of our obedience, as that our nature is thereby mended, and that we have sincerely endeavoured to be restored to the image of God, in which we were created, we shall, whenever we die, be received into that heavenly state which our sin had made us uncapable of.

All this God has made known to us, in order to awaken us, and to make us careful how we spend this short life.

Now, because our eternal weal or woe must depend upon this trial, God has been so gracious as to give us laws and rules to live by, which are most proper to cure our corruption, and to fit us for heaven.

SERM. XCIV.

He has also given us warning of such things as will certainly divert us from minding this great work, if we be not careful to avoid them.

He has indeed forbidden us many things; but then they are only such as would certainly shut us out of heaven.

He has foretold us of the dangers we may encounter, and the enemies we have to struggle with; but then He has assured us of all the assistance we shall at any time stand in need of.

In order to this, He has promised His Holy Spirit to all that ask for Him in sincerity, to be an almighty principle of a new life, in every soul with whom He vouchsafes to dwell. And He is given to, and will dwell with, every Christian who takes care not to grieve Him by his evil deeds.

This is our condition, this is our case: we are in this life upon our good behaviour; we are in a state of penance for what is past, and we are upon our trial for the time to come, even for eternity.

And that we may most highly value the love of God, and not think that these conditions are hard, or impossible to be performed, His Son did, in our nature, submit to all this, to convince us, that there is no other way for mortal man to regain the favour of God, but *this:* to resign ourselves wholly to God's will and pleasure, to do what He commands, to avoid what He forbids, to suffer what He appoints, and to be pleased with all His choices.

So that nothing but an holy life, and following the commands of Jesus Christ, can possibly secure to us the favour of God, or save us from eternal misery when we die.

II. And this brings us to the next thing to be considered, and that is, *what alteration death will make in our condition.*

That it will make a very great alteration, all people are convinced of it; they *fear*, they *avoid* it; they take all pains to *keep it off;* and they generally *submit to it unwillingly.*

And indeed there is great reason for all this, if people are not prepared for death; or if they have set their hearts upon this world; or if they have not a true knowledge of death, and the reason of it.

If a man is not prepared for death, he cannot but meet it

with amazement. *The night is come when no man can work.* [John 9. 4.] His time *of trial* is at an end. And he has a summons to appear before the bar of God's justice, in these words: "Careless man! this night shall thy soul be required of thee." [Luke 12. 20.]

Not less terrible is death to those whose souls are fastened to the world,—by its pleasures, profits, honours, or any other of its idols. So saith the Wise Man: "O death; how bitter is the remembrance of thee to a man that liveth at rest in his possessions; unto the man that hath nothing to vex him, and that hath prosperity in all things!" Ecclus. 41. 1.

But if the thoughts of death be so bitter, the sight must needs be insupportable, to a man whose soul was bound up in the world. Forasmuch as death strips him of every thing he valued; of every friend, of every pleasure, of authority, of power, of estate, of every thing in which he placed his happiness.

A great alteration this; and should in reason teach people to moderate their affections for every thing the world doats on, if it were but to prevent the trouble of parting with them at the hour of death.

But, alas! this is but the least of that anguish which will then seize men, if the love of the world has till then hindered them from loving God, and obeying His laws. A frightful consideration this! To be going to appear before God, whose laws I have broken and never repented of it, whose promises I have slighted, and whose judgments I have never till then regarded.

But even good men are not altogether without their fears, upon the prospect of that change which death is going to make in their condition, whether they look upon death, either as painful to nature; or as a just punishment of sin; or, lastly, as a messenger calling them before their Judge. But then *these fears,* in good men, are capable of being lessened, if not quite removed.

Even *a dying criminal,* if truly penitent, will comfort his soul with such thoughts as these, and support his spirits against the terrors of death: 'The pains of death will soon be over; if they were to be longer, they are the due reward of my crimes; the sentence is righteous, and just, and as

SERM. XCIV.

such I submit to it, and I cannot but esteem the very judge who condemned me; and I am sure that if he knew the disposition with which I receive the sentence of death, he would pity me, though he would not think fit to recall his sentence.'

And will not such considerations as these serve to sweeten the approach of death, and strip it of much of its terrors?

For suppose a man should thus reason with himself: 'I know by faith, that death is the fruit and the punishment of sin, a punishment to which we are all condemned by the righteous judgment of God; I am therefore bound to submit to it, out of love to His justice; if I do it willingly, my death will (like that of my Saviour's) be a sacrifice of obedience to God. And why should I increase my accounts by an uneasy and rebellious temper? Rather let me cast myself on God's mercy, and, by an humble compliance with His will, I may hope to make some atonement for my sins, which I cannot recall.'

But after all, there is nothing like a sober, and a Christian life, which can give a man any solid comfort, when death calls him to judgment. Not that we are to set bounds to the mercies of God; or, by any means, exclude a sincere and timely repentance. But these are favours in the hands of God, and not to be expected by such as live in rebellion against Him.

Rev. 3. 3. Let us rather remember what the Spirit saith: "Thou shalt not know what hour I will come." Will it not then be the highest presumption to persuade ourselves that we have time enough to prepare for death, when God Himself declares that we have not one moment certain?

III. And this brings us to consider, *what preparation is necessary to make our lives easy, and our death happy.*

And first let us remember, that life was given us for this very end, to make trial of our behaviour here; and that by an holy life, and a careful preparation for death, our souls and bodies may be a worthy sacrifice to God, when He shall think fit to call us out of this world.

In the next place; let us fix this in our minds, and never forget it, that *now* is the time, in which we are to choose *where* we are to be, and *what* we are to be, for ever. And

for our encouragement let us be assured, *that a timely preparation for death* will arm us against the fear of death, and against all other fears whatever.

But forasmuch as THE PREPARATIONS OF THE HEART ARE FROM THE LORD, from Him we must ask this grace; and we must ask it with *great earnestness,* as a grace without which we shall perish everlastingly. [Prov. 16. 1.]

We must beg Him to remove all those *hindrances,* which may divert us from *considering our latter end,* and from preparing for it.

And because *the love of the world* is the greatest of those *hindrances,* we must beg of God, in the first place, to give us the eyes of faith, that we may see the world just as it really is; the folly of its pleasures, the vanity of its promises, the shortness of its rewards, the multitude of its snares, and the dangers of its temptations.

When once we shall be well convinced of this, we shall be better prepared to fix our hearts upon the happiness of another life, and to love that good God, who has prepared such happiness for them that in this world strive to please Him.

The way to do this, and to be so far prepared for death, is, in the first place, to have our worldly affairs, as much as possible, in that order, that we may not only have discharged a good conscience in disposing of them; but, by declaring what we owe, and what is owing to us, we may prevent disputes, and preserve peace and charity among those we leave behind us.

And, forasmuch as GOD has expressly CHARGED THEM THAT ARE RICH, THAT THEY BE READY TO GIVE, AND GLAD TO DISTRIBUTE; and all others are exhorted *to be merciful after their power;* and God having declared, that *with such sacrifices He is well pleased; that He will not forget this labour of love;* that is, their works of charity; and *that this is the laying up for themselves a good foundation,* a growing stock, *for the time to come.* All this, I say, shews, that it is an indispensable duty, a duty most pleasing to God, to be all our life long, as well as when we come to die, giving to the poor, according to our ability, and the good disposition which God shall give us. [1 Tim. 6. 17—19; Heb. 6. 10; 13. 16.]

SERM. XCIV.

This is called in holy Scripture, LENDING UNTO THE LORD; so that we are sure of a good paymaster; and it will still be better for us, if the payment is deferred till after our death.

And indeed this is so necessary a preparation for death, [Tobit 4. 9.] that it is called, A GATHERING TO OURSELVES A GOOD REWARD IN THE DAY OF NECESSITY; than which none sure can be greater than the day of death.

And therefore most thoughtful people, lest they should be [1 Cor. 16. 2; Ps. 41. 1.] wanting in *this* duty, do follow the apostle's advice, and "do regularly lay by them in store, according as God has prospered them," that they may have to give to them that need; and "that the Lord may deliver them in the time of trouble," as He has promised to do.

The next care of every Christian who desires to be always prepared for death, must be, to see that his faith be such as it should be. A firm faith in *God's Word*, in His promises and threatenings therein contained; a firm faith in *Jesus Christ*, His only Son, and our only Saviour; and that God will, for His sake, be reconciled unto all such as with hearty repentance turn unto Him; lastly, a firm faith in the *Holy Ghost*, and that *He* it is who enlightens the minds of such as fear God, and that He works in them all good dispositions, [Luke 11. 13.] and enables them to follow that which is good, "and that God will give this Holy Spirit to them that ask Him."

Whoever has this faith, and a full resolution to order his life accordingly, always bearing in mind what the apostle Rom. 2. 7. assures us of, that *eternal life* will be the portion of those only *who, by continuance in well-doing, seek for glory;* such a person, we say, is in a very good way of preparation for death.

But that he may continue in this good way, it is also absolutely necessary, that he close with the means of grace which God has ordained for our salvation. That he attend the Church carefully; that he hear God's Word reverently; that he constantly pray to God; and that especially, whenever the memorial of Christ's death is celebrated in the Sacrament of the Lord's Supper, he receive it with great devotion, as the most *sovereign medicine* for all the diseases of the soul, and especially against that universal disease, *the fear of death*.

He that expects to have Christ his Saviour when he dies, must devote himself entirely to God while he lives, and very seriously resolve, that nothing in this world shall prevail with him to do what he believes will displease God.

Particularly, he will submit patiently to God's will under all trials and afflictions, because they are of God's ordering.

He will depend upon God's good providence, both for delivering him out of danger, and for supplying all his wants; and he will have great regard to every thing which has any relation to God; by which he will recommend himself to God's favour at the hour of death, and in the day of judgment.

And, that he may have as little as possible to answer for with respect to *his neighbour*, he will endeavour to be just in his dealings, will neither take, nor detain, nor so much as covet, what is another's.

He will be faithful to his word, and keep his tongue from evil-speaking, lying, and slandering, and will readily forgive as he hopes for forgiveness from God.

He will strive to be at peace with all, and will be obedient to his governors and pastors; and he will endeavour to do all these things with this view, TO PLEASE GOD. And then he is sure to have God pleased with him.

With regard to himself, he will keep a strict watch over his senses, lest intemperance get the mastery over him; and, above all things, he will be afraid of growing lukewarm and indifferent for eternity, lest he should be surprised by death when he least thinks of it.

Every Christian, who has been so happy as to lead such a life as this, will have reason to hope well for himself, and to trust in the mercy, and goodness, and promises of God, when he comes to die. He knows that the STING OF DEATH IS SIN; that therefore an holy life must be the best security against the fear of death. [1 Cor. 15. 56.]

And whoever has not been so happy as to lead such a careful life, has no other way to secure himself against the fear of death, and the very dreadful consequence of dying unprepared, but to make his peace with God by a timely repentance, by not delaying to do it one moment.

In order to this, let the number of sudden deaths oblige

SERM. XCIV.

him to count himself to be one of those who is to be surprised by death; which, if any thing, will force him to set about making the best and speediest preparation he can.

And this must be, by not hiding, but confessing the sins of his life past; by judging and condemning himself for them; by putting on the most solemn resolutions of living more Christianly for the time to come; by begging God's pardon and gracious assistance, to enable him to make good his resolutions.

By keeping these resolutions in his mind, and calling himself often to an account, and warily avoiding temptations to the sins he has been most subject to; by making restitution, as far as it is in his power, for any injuries he has done to others, and forgiving all such as have injured or offended him, as he himself expects forgiveness at God's hands; by endeavouring to make such as he has drawn into sin, if it be possible, sensible of their danger, at least to beg of God to touch their hearts most powerfully from above, and to pardon their sin.

Whoever does this in the sincerity of his soul, God will graciously pardon what is past; and if he afterwards continues to live in the fear of God, he will certainly, when he dies, die in the favour of God. For, this favour, this mighty favour, Jesus Christ has obtained for all true penitents with the price of His own blood; for which we can never be sufficiently thankful.

And this brings us to the last thing which I proposed to lay before you, in order to awaken, to encourage, and to force Christians to prepare for death; which was,

IV. To set before you, *the very different thoughts and reflections of dying persons, both of good and bad men,* that you may resolve this day, what you will choose, what end you will make.

Suppose, therefore, you should hear a dying sinner thus *expostulating* with himself, thus *lamenting* his sad condition: 'God forgive me, how sadly have I spent the greatest part of my life! What a sad end is this of all my pleasures, to be now tormented with the remembrance of them, and with the dread of what I am like to suffer for them! I have led an idle and a useless life. How dreadful are *now* those words

to my soul, which till now I never minded :—*Cast ye the unprofitable servant into outer darkness!* What madness was it to spend a life in sin and vanity, which was given me to prepare for this sad hour! How have I despised and turned my back upon the poor members of Christ, when God gave me enough for them and for myself too! How much have I spent upon myself in clothes and luxury, which would have kept many a one warm, and filled many an hungry belly? Oh the folly, the madness of pride and intemperance, which I could never see till now—till *now*, when it is too late to see it to any good purpose! Would to God I had never seen those wretched people, who tempted me to sin, to revelling and drunkenness, to whoredom and intemperance.' [Matt. 25. 30.]

'What signifies (saith another) the estate that I have got by *injustice*, by *fraud*, or *oppression?* It is now a plague to myself, and will too likely be a curse to my children, for whose sake I took such ways to get it. It is not *now* in my power to make amends for the injury I did my neighbour in his body, goods, or good name. How shall I answer it to God, before whom I am going to be judged?'

'The estate, (says another,) which my ancestors left me, has been a snare and a curse to me; but so I made it myself, my wretched self. The authority and power which I was so fond of do now serve only to torment me, because I used them so very ill.'

'I have been careful, (saith another,) for every thing, but for my soul. I have been afraid of every thing else, of poverty, of shame, of afflictions; but I never feared for my soul till now, when my fears only serve to torment me. How often have I shut my ears, and turned my back upon God, when He spoke to me, by His ministers, by afflictions, by my own conscience! And now He is going to call me to an account for my perverseness! Happy had it been for me, if I had given credit to God, to His ministers; if I had *believed*, and *repented*, and had brought forth fruits meet for repentance. But, alas! I slighted the worship of God, His Word, and Sacraments; I joined with those fools who counted the life of the righteous madness; but now he is comforted, and we are tormented. Oh! that God would spare me, I would not *now* stick to take shame to myself, for

SERM. XCIV.

such a scandal I gave to the Church of God. I would repair such and such injuries; I would never neglect the occasions of serving God.'

Why now, Christians, God spares you, and me, and every one who enjoys life, for these very purposes: to repent of what we have done amiss; to lead a new life, as a proof of the sincerity of our repentance; and to make our peace with Him before we go hence and be no more seen.

Thus I have laid before you some of the thoughts of those who have never thought of death till they are upon their sick bed; till the number, the weight, the wilfulness of their sins, awaken them into fears which no mortal man can describe.

And it is this horror and anguish of dying sinners, which one would endeavour to prevent by all the arguments that are likely to awaken men; that we may all without delay, who have not already done it, set about that work, which we shall otherwise sadly wish we had done, when perhaps it may be too late to do any thing but to bewail our folly in a miserable eternity.

On the other hand; a Christian, of a sober and thoughtful life, will strip the approach of death of most of its terrors, by such reasonings as these: 'The sentence of death is already passed upon me, I cannot avoid it; I confess with the penitent thief, that I suffer justly the punishment of sin; I do acknowledge the justice of my sentence, and will resign myself to it after a Christian manner. It is now my comfort, that God has had some portion of my time and thoughts; and since He has given me time and grace to make use of it, I will comfort myself as Manoah's wife did: "If the Lord were pleased to kill us, He would not have shewed us all these things."'

Judges 13. 23.

So saith the humble, penitent, dying Christian: 'If God has given me an opportunity of renewing my vows, and a will to do it; if He has accepted my alms and my good deeds, by giving me an heart to do such; if He has opened mine ear to discipline, and has chastised me with the chastening of His children; why, then, I have good hopes, that His graces are not in vain, but that He will crown them with pardon, favour, and happiness eternal. I will therefore

with an humble confidence lay hold on the promises of God to sincere penitents: *I know* (with St. Paul) *whom I have believed, and I am persuaded that He is able to keep that which I have committed to Him against that day.* It is true, I am to be stripped by death of all my worldly enjoyments; but I am not without hopes of meeting with much greater. I leave my children behind me; but I comfort myself in this, that I took such care of their education, that I hope to meet them in the paradise of God. All my trials and afflictions are now to end; now they appear as blessings which God made use of to prepare me for this hour. I will therefore endeavour to meet my death as a deliverance from sin, from banishment, and from captivity, and as a passage to a much better world.' 2 Tim. 1. 12.

After all, he that hath lived the best life will stand in need of mercy at the hour of death. And even the greatest sinner has not sinned beyond the power of grace, and the efficacy of the blood of Christ, provided he defer not his repentance.

In one word; THE STING OF DEATH IS SIN. It is that which makes the very thoughts of death a torment to us. Therefore, a Christian life is the only cure for the fear of death, and for that great change it will make in our condition. [1 Cor. 15. 56.]

And now, good Christians, see what a dreadful folly it is to live as if we had nothing to do in this world; or, as if we were to live here for ever. You see what a change death will make in our condition. No more to be done; too late to repent, to wish, to resolve, to promise, to do any thing.

And be assured of it, that it is no matter how a man spends his life, if he is not preparing for death and for eternity.

In the death of others, we see what we ourselves are, and what we must come to. Could we see the world as we shall judge of it when we come to die, there is nothing in it that would tempt us to hazard our souls for.

You have seen a child extremely fond of his playthings, and impatient to part with them. An hour after, he falls sick; you strive to please him with the things he was just now so fond of; he lets them drop out of his hand, and will not so much as look on them.

SERM. XCIV.

Why indeed, Christians, this will be the case of every one of us, when we come to die; we shall despise, we shall loath, we shall hate, the very things which now keep us from preparing for our latter end.

When we see others go before us, we are apt to bless ourselves, that it is not our lot, and that we are yet alive. But, for God's sake, where is the comfort, if we make no good use of the time which God still continues to us?

And let me take good notice of it; that though the death of others does not much affect me now, yet it must come to be my own case; and when it does do so, it will be of the greatest moment to me, whether I am to be happy or miserable for ever.

It is our great comfort, that our time is in God's hands; that nothing can deprive us of life without His leave. So that we may be sure, if we are in the way of salvation, when He calls for us, it will be well with us, though we have not done all that we could wish we had done.

This, I say, is our comfort. But then let us not delay one moment to put ourselves into the way of life, lest death should overtake us unawares.

Let us ever remember, that we shall rise out of the grave just as we go into it, either favourites or enemies of God to all eternity.

In one word; let us be persuaded to live like Christians, and then we may every one of us say with St. Paul, TO ME TO DIE IS GAIN. [Phil. 1. 21.]

And, O God! grant, that what has now been said may contribute something to that blessed end; and that I myself, and all who have heard me, may remember, that our sentence of death is already passed; that therefore we may make the remainder of our lives a worthy preparation for death.

Deliver every soul of us from the blindness of trusting to a death-bed repentance; and fix this truth in all our hearts, *that if we live without care, we shall die without comfort.*

Now, to God the Father, the Son, and Holy Ghost, be ascribed all honour and glory, world without end. Amen.

SERMON XCV.

PREACHED AT THE FUNERAL OF MR. EVAN CHRISTIAN.

THE HAPPINESS OF THOSE WHO DIE IN THE FAITH AND FAVOUR OF GOD.

REV. xiv. 13.

I heard a voice from heaven, saying unto me, Write, Blessed are the dead which die in the Lord, from henceforth: Yea, saith the Spirit, that they may rest from their labours; and their works do follow them.

I HAVE made choice of this part of the office *for the burial of the dead,* for our present meditations, *not without very good reasons,* and which you will easily apprehend without much insisting upon them.

For instance: you will conclude, that when I chose these words, I did believe them very suitable, and applicable *in an especial manner,* to the person who now lies dead before us; and indeed so I did—otherwise I should have abused a sacred text of Scripture to ends very unworthy of a minister of God.

But besides this, I had in my thoughts *the present times of sickness* and *mortality,* in which it has pleased God to visit very many families.

I considered how natural it was for people to be concerned for themselves, when so many about them are taken away, and even *some* upon very short warning.

I concluded with myself, that if ever sober reason would take place with people, it would surely be received when they were under apprehensions of danger; for so saith the prophet of God: "When Thy judgments are in the world, [Is. 26. 9.]

SERM. XCV.

the inhabitants of the earth will learn righteousness." Then, or never, they will be serious and thoughtful.

I was sure, that the danger of dying under the displeasure of God was more to be dreaded than any calamity that could possibly befall a mortal man. I knew very well, that *this* consideration, and *this* only, makes death truly terrible; makes the loss of our friends more sensible and afflicting, and our own lives no better than a burden to us.

Upon the whole, I did conclude, that certainly here is a just occasion offered us, of considering how all these evils may be prevented; how the bitter thoughts of death may be sweetened, and become acceptable; how we shall be gainers, *if it is not our own fault,* by that change which we so industriously avoid; and lastly, how our departure hence may be matter of *comfort,* instead of *sorrow,* to those we leave behind us.

And which I shall endeavour to shew, from the words just read to you, *blessed are the dead which die in the Lord;* that is, happy are they who die in the faith and favour of God.

They are happy upon many accounts, but chiefly upon these two; in that now *they rest from their labours,* they are set free from all the burdens of a mortal life; they are no longer subject to *temptations,* or the danger of being overcome by them; they are freed from *diseases,* and the uneasiness that attends them; *grief,* and *cares,* and *sorrows,* and *persecution,* are all at an end; or, as Job very elegantly sets forth the condition and state of the dead: "There the wicked cease from troubling, and there the weary are at rest. There the prisoners rest together; they hear not the voice of the oppressor."

Chap. 3. 17, 18.

But all faithful Christians are much more happy upon another account. They are not only freed from outward calamities, and inward sorrows, but they are put into a condition of present happiness. *Their works do follow them,* or (as perhaps it should be rendered) *do accompany them* as *witnesses,* or *proofs,* of their having been faithful stewards of the talents committed to their charge.

I need not spend time in proving *this: that good men, after death, are at rest, and in a happy condition.* The Spirit of God has expressly said it; and Christians are so generally

persuaded of the certainty of it, that every one for himself hopes that *rest* and *happiness* shall be his *own* portion at the last.

Now, if people did not very often deceive themselves in these hopes and expectations, there would be no need of so many cautions in holy Scripture given to Christians, not to deceive themselves with vain hopes.

But the Spirit of God, which knows what is in man, foresaw, that when eternal happiness should be offered to all men, who should qualify themselves for heaven, a great many would think themselves secure of happiness who will have no reason for such expectations, besides a very natural desire of hoping well for themselves.

That I may therefore set this matter in as clear a light as the time will allow me to do it, I will endeavour to explain the meaning of this expression in the text: *Blessed are the dead which die in the Lord.*

I. And in the first place, it is plain, that the blessedness here spoken of is designed for *those*, and *those only, who die in the Lord.* All others are excluded. Neither the *tears* nor the *prayers* of their friends, nothing that can be done for them; no, not the goodness and mercy of God, which is so often depended upon even against His express word: none of these will avail us, if *we die not in the Lord.*

For the same Spirit of truth, who for our support and encouragement has made known to us, that the happiness which God has prepared for His faithful servants is *inexpressibly great;* the same Spirit of God has declared, that those who in this life have no regard to the commands of God, shall in the next be most *miserable*, and for ever *undone.*

"Be not deceived" (saith the Apostle); "neither forni- 1 Cor. 6. 9.
cators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor effeminate, nor abusers of themselves with mankind, nor thieves, nor covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor extortioners, shall inherit the kingdom of God."

Be not deceived: why, who ever gave such people hopes that they might be happy after death? Nobody: but their own deceitful hearts made them to wish what was impossible, that they might enjoy their lusts in *this* life, and the happiness of saints and angels in the next.

SERM. XCV.

II. But, secondly, not only wicked men, who *depart this life* in their sins unrepented of, are certainly shut out of the kingdom of heaven; but even such as have nothing else to depend upon but *a death-bed repentance*, their condition is deplorable beyond expression or remedy.

St. Paul's commission, from Jesus Christ Himself, was this: that he should endeavour *to open the eyes* of the Gen-
Acts 26. 18. tiles to whom he was sent, "to turn them from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan unto God." Accordingly, he preached every where, that *people should repent*, and *turn to God, and do works meet for repentance.*

Here are works to be done after we have repented: *that is*
[John 9. 4.] *plain.* Do but add our Saviour's words to these; *the night cometh, when no man can work;* and you will see whether a minister of Christ can speak comfort to such as never think of preparing themselves for heaven till they come to die, or whether such can hope that they *die in the Lord.*

One would not limit the mercies of God, nor discourage people from detesting their *insensibility*, their *carelessness*, their *abominable wickedness*, their *strange unfruitfulness* under the means of grace which God has afforded them: one would not discourage people from confessing these, and detesting them even in their last moments.

But this is what we can only say to them after all: they are not within the covenant of grace, they have not done works meet for repentance. The promise is to *these* and to *these* only.

If God, who sees their sorrow, and knows what is in man, and what would have been the effects of *that sorrow*, if He should have given them a longer time; if *He* will accept of such repentance as this, they will have the greater reason to be eternally thankful; but this is what He has given us no authority to declare in His name, in order to comfort people at the hour of death.

The *will of God is*, that all who call themselves Christians should honour Him in their lives, should avoid those things that are contrary to their profession, and follow such things as are agreeable to the same; that they should repent when they have done amiss, and *repent* in time, that they may manifest the sincerity of their repentance, by continuing in the practice of holiness unto their lives' end.

To these He has promised favour and mercy for Christ's sake, though their sins have been many, and their best works imperfect.

As for all others, they have neither grounds for their hopes of pardon, nor promise of any reward, but that of wicked servants.

III. We must add, in the last place, *that not only notorious sinners, but even unprofitable servants, will be excluded from entering into the joy of their Lord.*

There are people who verily believe that all is well with them, and shall be well with them at the last, because they cannot charge themselves with *drunkenness, perjury, whoredom, extortion, violent oppression,* and the like crying sins. Or, perhaps, they have *repented* of these crimes, and resolve to be guilty of them no more. Why, truly, this is very commendable, and a hopeful step towards gaining the favour of God.

But this is not all that is expected from those that hope to *die in the Lord.* There are things *to be done,* as well as things which *ought not to be done,* by the faithful servants of Jesus Christ.

One would wonder how so many people come to be persuaded, that a life retired from the world, and spent in devotions, should be most acceptable to God. Pray what were we sent into the world for? Was it not to try how we would behave ourselves in it? How we would use the talents, or opportunities of doing good, which God has afforded us?

Now if, instead of doing this, we resolve to get out of the world as much as we can, and do little or no good in our generation, under pretence of avoiding temptations (as if God could not defend us in every state His providence calls us to); or under pretence of serving God more devoutly (as if God were not to be served in works, as well as in words); or lastly, under pretence that God does not expect it from us: 'I am not made for *business;* I love *retirement;* if I take care of one, that is all I can do.' Such resolutions as these will deceive us at the last, and will stand us in no stead, when we shall appear before God, to be rewarded or punished.

I say not this without good authority.

SERM. XCV.

Do but consider with me *the words of the text*, and let us apply them. *Blessed are the dead.* What, all the dead? No; but they *that die in the Lord.* And who are they? Why, those whose works *accompany them* into the other world.

Then let us every one ask himself this question, What have I done which may witness for me before God, *that I loved Him with all my heart;* that I feared to offend Him; that I put my whole trust in Him; that I did Him honour in the world?

These are the duties we owe to God, and it will be expected from us, that we have some proof along with us of our having done these. And it will not be sufficient to say, We have *heard Thy word*, and *prayed* in Thy name. The answer is already given, *Do not even the publicans the same?* [Matt. 5. 46.]

And if the same questions are asked with respect to the duties we owe to our neighbour, we shall then be better able to judge how we shall appear in the presence of God. "For if our hearts condemn us, God is greater than our hearts, and knoweth all things; but if our heart condemn us not," (after we have taken pains to search its state,) "then may we have confidence towards God," that He will not be severe against us. [1 John 3. 20, 21.]

From what has been already said, you will easily perceive, that it is plain folly to expect to die the death of the righteous, when one has not prepared himself by an holy life for such a happy change.

IV. And this brings us to consider *what those things are, which, at the hour of death, will make the great difference betwixt the blessed and the miserable.*

And though I must not say, *it is their good works* which will render the righteous acceptable to God, for that is a doctrine very contrary to God's Word; but this I must say, (for so saith the Spirit of God,) that their *good works must follow them,* must attend them, as *evidences* and *testimonies* of their *repentance,* and *faith* in God, and of their charity to men *for God's sake.*

Having these witnesses of our sincerity, we may plead with God for His promises in Jesus Christ, and hope to be accepted.

For instance: I may depend upon the *sincerity of my*

repentance, if with an honest heart I can say, that I have been truly careful in calling myself to an account, and in examining into the state of my soul; that I have endeavoured to avoid falling into those sins which I have repented of; and taken such methods for avoiding them, as are most likely to secure me against such relapses.

I may with truth say, that I love God, if for His sake, and for securing His favour, I have renounced my own corrupt inclinations, been concerned to do His will, and keep His commandments; if I have been afraid of doing what might displease God, and have been ready to suffer any inconvenience rather than do what I believe will *offend* or *dishonour* Him.

I may be assured, that *my faith* will be approved of God, if it shall appear that I have received all the truths of the Gospel, as coming from God, with great thankfulness and humility; and that I have endeavoured to order my conversation so as to be agreeable to the Gospel I have professed to believe.

As to the duties which I owe to my *neighbour:* if I have really performed them, I shall have something to witness for me, that I have done so; if I have been poor, for instance, and have not endeavoured to better my condition by unjust ways; or, if I have been rich, and have not assumed such a property in what God has given me, as to neglect to dispense them for His honour, and the good of my fellow-creatures; if God has given me *authority,* and I have not abused it; or *means of doing good,* and I have not grudged my time and pains, or laid up my talent in a napkin; if I have kept my body in temperance, soberness, and chastity, as becomes the temple of God, for so the Holy Spirit is pleased to honour us: all these virtues will be my witnesses, that I *lived* and *died in the Lord,* and that I shall be eternally happy with all such as have done so before me, or that shall so live after me.

I shall not say how much of this character belongs to this good man whose remains lie before us. It is so natural to apply every thing said at this time, that is pious, or praiseworthy, or of good report, that I am confident you have all made an application already suitable to his deservings.

I shall only add, that he is going to the grave with such a

SERM. XCV.

character amongst men, and such a *testimony* of good works attending him, that, when God thinks fit to call for any of us, the very best of us may wish *his* case may be *ours*.

He lived to a good old age, or, as it is elegantly expressed in the book of Job, *He is come to his grave in a full age, like as a shock of corn cometh in, in his season.*

Chap. 5. 26.

He neither shortened his days by intemperance, nor was he overmuch concerned to live any longer, than while he could be of use in his generation.

He did all the good he could for his *country*, for his *family*, for his *friends*, and for his *neighbours*. In short, he has been a common benefactor to this poor place, and his loss will be sooner felt than made up.

Would to God I could persuade many of you that hear me, to follow his example. And why should not we all do so?

His education was not above the common rate of his neighbours: but this should convince us of a truth, which too few take notice of, that holiness of life is the only sure way to wisdom and a sound judgment of things. Under this disposition of mind, every thing we read, or hear of, or meet with, will afford matter of useful improvement.

I am sure this was the way this good man took; having subdued his will and affections to the rule of God's commandments, by this means his faculties were enlarged, and his understanding disposed for, and stocked with, abundance of useful knowledge, such as would surprise and edify those who knew him intimately.

Let us now leave him and his good works, which shall either accompany or follow him, in the hands of his Creator, to receive that blessing which His well-beloved Son shall pronounce to all that love and fear Him, saying, "Come ye blessed children of My Father, receive the kingdom prepared for you from the beginning of the world."

[Matt. 25. 34.]

And let *us* in the mean time return to ourselves and to our text. And from what has been said, let us at least make this just inference: that it is not our believing or not believing these important truths we have been speaking of, that will make these truths of more or less concern to us. If God has determined to deal with us, when we die, according to the works done in the body, which works will follow us

whether we will or not; if He has prepared a place of happiness for the righteous, and a place of torments for the careless and the wicked; then these things are true, and will come to pass, whether we believe, whether we think of them or not.

It is true, we may find out a thousand ways to divert our minds from thinking of these things; we may put the evil day far from us, notwithstanding the many objects of mortality which we see and hear of: but then this is not what wise people should do; it is to do that very thing which foolish, unthoughtful people have been used to *speak;* it is to *take a leap into the dark,* without considering, that such as do so will most certainly light in the *lake that burneth with fire and brimstone.* [Rev. 21. 8.]

From which *place* and *fate,* the God of mercy deliver us, and from *that* unthoughtfulness and *that* wickedness, which infallibly lead to it.

Let us remember, that nothing that is impossible, or that is unreasonable, is expected from, or required of us, in order to obtain that blessedness here spoken of.

We approve of and we praise those virtues in others, which qualify them for heaven; and why should we not imitate them?

In short, imitate them we must, or we shall never attain that happiness *they* enjoy, and *we* hope for; nor escape that punishment which they are freed from, and which we dare not think of without the utmost dread and terror.

To conclude: those who can despise the happiness of heaven, and the torments of hell, are proof against all other arguments which can be made use of for their conversion.

Preserve us, O God, from that strange madness of being only concerned for this life, without providing for an everlasting well-being; that making good use of the time which Thou vouchsafest us here, when we come to die, we may be received into Thine everlasting kingdom, with all those that have died in the true faith and fear of God. Grant this, O merciful God, for Jesus Christ's sake. To Whom, with the Father and the Holy Spirit, be all honour and glory, world without end. Amen.

SERMON XCVI.

PREACHED AT THE FUNERAL OF OLD MRS. MURRAY.

THE HAPPINESS OF THOSE WHO DIE IN THE FAITH AND FAVOUR OF GOD.

REV. xiv. 13.

Blessed are the dead which die in the Lord, from henceforth: Yea, saith the Spirit, that they may rest from their labours; and their works do follow them.

IT was with great reason, that our Church (directed by the Spirit of God) made these words a part of her office for the burial of the dead.

Either *relation,* or *friendship,* or *decency,* or *custom,* some consideration or other, brings always a number of people together upon these occasions.

And the very occasion itself is apt to make most people more serious and thoughtful than ordinary.

And the whole office is designed, and is most proper, to improve our seriousness to the best purposes, particularly these words I have made choice of for your present meditations; not, I hope, without very good reasons.

For, in the first place, every body who knew the person whose remains now lie before us will, I am persuaded, conclude, that I have not made an improper choice of a subject for this occasion.

If an unblemished character, if a good life, (the best proof of a sincere faith,) if a most commendable industry, which yet never hindered her from attending the public worship, if a peaceable and inoffensive conduct, which appeared in her

having scarce an enemy in the world, if a most tender care and concern for her family and relations, and yet a most remarkable patience and resignation to the will of God, upon the loss of so many hopeful children taken away in the bloom of their years: lastly; if an exemplary temperance, which, through the blessing of God, preserved her health, and lengthened her days to an uncommon age; if such virtues as these will justify us in applying the general promises of the Gospel to particular cases and persons, I shall not be judged to have misapplied a sacred text to purposes unworthy of a minister of Christ.

But the Church had a further design in the choice of this Scripture for this office. She considered the case of the living in that of the dead; as also what generally comes into the thoughts of serious people upon the death of their friends: that now, their condition is unalterably fixed; they are either happy or miserable, and sure to be so for ever.

She would have, therefore, all her members admonished by this so often repeated portion of Scripture, so to lead their lives, as that their friends may have comfort in their death.

And she would have their friends, as St. Paul exhorts us, not to be overmuch concerned, "not to sorrow as men without hope, for them that sleep in Christ;" since we have the word of God for it, that such as are dead in the Lord are blessed and happy. 1 Thess. 4. 13.

Besides all this, I had in my thoughts a too general delusion of Christians, who are but too apt to hope well for themselves, very often without reason and without Scripture: who hope, who expect, to *die in the Lord,* in the favour of God, and to be happy when they are dead, without considering what sort of works are like to follow them: as if those awakening words of the God of truth did no way concern us: "Strait is the gate, and narrow is the way, which leadeth unto life, and few there be that find it." Matt. 7. 14.

Upon the whole, I did conclude, that certainly here is a good occasion offered us, of considering how this evil may be prevented; how the bitter thoughts of death may be sweetened; how we may be gainers (if it is not plainly our own fault) by that change which we so industriously avoid; and

SERM. XCVI.

lastly, how our departure hence may be matter of comfort, instead of sorrow, to those we leave behind us.

All which I shall endeavour to shew from the words just now read to you; which are introduced after a very remarkable manner: I HEARD A VOICE FROM HEAVEN, SAYING, WRITE, (write this that follows, as most worthy to be transmitted to all future generations,) THAT BLESSED ARE THE DEAD WHICH DIE IN THE LORD; that is, in the Christian faith, in Christian communion, and in Christian charity, accompanied with good works and an holy life; such are certainly BLESSED; THEY REST FROM THEIR LABOURS; they are freed from all the burdens, temptations, and troubles, of this mortal life, from outward calamities, and inward sorrows; AND THEIR WORKS DO FOLLOW THEM, as witnesses and proofs of the good use they have made of the *talents*, the *life*, the *health*, and all other means of glorifying God, and doing good in their generation, which God has vouchsafed them.

I will not take up your time in proving the very different portions of good and bad men in the state after death; the certainty of which, the happiness of the one, and the misery of the other, being as unquestionable, as that there is a God, and as that *this* Word of His [the Bible] is true.

Both good and bad men acknowledge this. The good hope and pray for a place in the paradise of God; and the wicked confess this, and will be judged out of their own mouths, when they curse their enemies to the pit of hell, as supposing it to be a place of misery and torment.

It will be of more use to consider who *may*, and who *must not*, hope to be happy when they die; *who* are sure to be miserable after this life, and *who* they are who are sure to escape the bitter pains of eternal death. Some certainty in *this* is surely the most desirable thing in this world. It is not *I* who must pretend to give you this certainty and satisfaction; but *God*, and *His* Word, you *may* depend on.

[Matt. 19. 17; 25. 41; John 5. 29.] IF THOU WILT ENTER INTO LIFE, saith the God of Truth, KEEP THE COMMANDMENTS. And again, THEY THAT HAVE DONE GOOD, SHALL GO INTO LIFE EVERLASTING; AND THEY THAT HAVE DONE EVIL, and have not repented, SHALL GO INTO EVERLASTING FIRE.

You will be apt to say, Who does not know this? Be it so. But then the generality of Christians do not consider, that to say they know this, and yet live as if there were not one syllable of truth in it, must be most provoking to God, and of most dreadful consequence to those that are guilty of such perverseness.

But how shall we know that our faith, and repentance, and works, will be acceptable to God? This brings us to consider what those things are, which at the hour of death will make that vast difference betwixt those that are to be blessed, and those that are like to be miserable.

And though we must not say it is merely their good works which will render the righteous the objects of God's mercy (for that is a doctrine contrary to God's Word); yet this we may say, because the Spirit hath said it, that their good works must follow, or accompany them, as evidences of their repentance, and faith, and charity; and that having these witnesses of our sincerity, we may plead the promises of God in Jesus Christ, and be assured of being accepted.

For instance: I may depend upon the sincerity of my repentance, if I can say with truth, that I have been careful to call myself to an account, and to examine into the state of my soul; that I have avoided, as much as possible, falling into the sins which I have repented of; that I have kept out of the way of temptation, and never think of my past offences but with sorrow, concern, and reproaching myself.

THIS IS A REPENTANCE UNTO LIFE NOT TO BE REPENTED OF. [2 Cor. 7. 10.]

And then I may, with truth, say, that I love God, if for His sake, and for the securing His favour, I have renounced my own corrupt desires and inclinations, and all those evil habits which I had unhappily contracted; that I am resolved to do His will, as far as it shall appear to me to be the will of God; that I am heartily concerned when I am sensible I have done otherwise, and resolve to do so no more; and lastly, that I am resolved to suffer any inconvenience, rather than do what I know will either offend or do Him dishonour.

In the next place, I may be confident, that my faith will be approved of God, if I have received the truths of the Gospel,

SERM. XCVI.

as coming from Him, with humility; and have endeavoured to order my life according to that Gospel which I profess to believe.

As to the duties which I owe to my neighbour and myself; if I have really performed them, I shall have something to witness for me, that I have really done so.

If I have been *poor*, for example, and have been content with my condition as ordered by providence, and have not attempted to better it by any unjust ways: or if I have been *rich*, and have not assumed such a property in what God has intrusted me with, as with His steward, so as to neglect to make use of it to His glory, and the benefit of the rest of His family; if God has given me *authority*, and I have not wilfully abused it: or opportunities and means of *doing good*, and I have cheerfully laid hold of them; if I have kept my body in temperance, soberness, and chastity, clean and pure, as the temple of God ought to be (for so the Spirit of God is pleased to honour us, and to call our bodies the temples of God); these all will be witnesses that I have lived, and SHALL DIE IN THE LORD, and shall be blessed and happy with all those that have had such works attending them into the next world.

Let us now take a view of those whose bad works do follow them; for the Scripture assures us, that both good and bad works do follow, and are to be judged in the life to come.

Let us set before our eyes the case of one who, when he comes to die, can scarcely comfort himself with any good he has done in the world; who has trifled away his whole life and time in doing nothing, or, what was worse than doing nothing, who has spent that upon himself, which might, and ought to have been the support of many besides; who never concerned himself with what others either suffered or wanted; who followed his pleasures continually, indulged all his appetites, and never knew what it was to deny himself what his soul desired; who cannot truly say, that he ever took any delight in the worship of God; that what he did in that way, was to comply with custom, or to avoid reproach. Consider whether you would be in such a man's case for the whole world!

But consider it to purpose; resolve that from the moment

you are convinced of this, you will, through the grace of God, make a good use of your time, do all the good you can, that you may have something to comfort you on your death-bed.

But there are very many worse cases than that we have been speaking of. Suppose then, that you should see another just ready to depart this life; one who had done abundance of mischief in his time; who had done a great deal of wrong, because it was in the power of his hand to do it; who had spent his riches in the service of hell; who by a bad example, had corrupted others, and been a means of their damnation; who, by propagating wicked principles, had led men into the ways of error and destruction.

Or, if you should see another, who had all his life long despised the worship, the ordinances, profaned the name, and the sabbaths of God, and rendered religion contemptible.

If you should see others, who had been heaping up riches, right or wrong; and others gaming them away in the midst of oaths and curses; lastly, if you should see others making a mock of sin, a jest of the crimes of whoredom, drunkenness, and blasphemy, which ought to make every Christian tremble, instead of countenancing them.

Do but for one moment consider the case of such people when they come to die, and you will conclude, as our Lord did of him that betrayed Him: IT HAD BEEN BETTER FOR THESE PEOPLE IF THEY HAD NEVER BEEN BORN; better that they had been the poorest beggars, the most miserable creatures on earth. [Mark 14. 21.]

And now, (good Christians,) you see who are excluded from this blessedness faithfully promised to such as die in the Lord. So that neither the tears, nor the prayers, of those they leave behind them, can any way help them.

This cuts off all the vain hopes of those deluded Christians who promise themselves heaven and happiness, either from a death-bed repentance, or from the mercy and goodness of God, or from the prayers and other good offices of their friends after they are dead.

A death-bed repentance is the most uncertain comfort, and not to be depended on. The mercy of God may be so

SERM. XCVI.

far abused as not to be expected. And the holy Scriptures are express, that they are not the good works of those who pray for us when we are dead, but the good works that we ourselves have done in the body, that must follow and witness for us before our Judge.

This shews the evil consequence of that doctrine, and the sad delusion of those that trust their salvation upon it, and to those they leave behind them: as if any man would be more concerned for my soul, and do more for me, than I would be persuaded to do for myself.

In the next place, consider, my Christian brethren, that it is not our believing, or not believing, or not minding, these important truths, that will make them of more or less concern to us.

If God has determined to deal with us when we die according to our works done in the body, which works will follow us, whether we will or not, either to plead for, or condemn us; then these things will come to pass, whether we believe, whether we think of them or not.

No thoughtful Christian, one would hope, would flatter himself, that his time, his repentance, his salvation, is in his own hands. "To-day," saith the Spirit, "if you will hear His voice," His call, "harden not your hearts." This then is the time of trial, of grace, of repentance, of mercy, and of securing our salvation.

No wise man, therefore, will, if he can possibly help it, lose the sight, the thoughts of death; it being that which must determine his fate for ever. And what an astonishing thing it must be, to be surprised, either in a course of sin, or in the midst of pleasures, or in an utter forgetfulness of God, you have already heard!

Since all our hopes consist in dying in the Lord, the great concern of our whole life ought to be a preparation for death. And then you will strip death of all its terrors; you will consider it as a most righteous sentence, passed upon you (as it is upon all mankind) for our sins. And that a willing submission to this sentence will be accepted of God, in union with that of Jesus Christ, as a full satisfaction for all the sins you have repented of. That, therefore, (if it has not been your own fault,) death will be no more an evil to you

than the release of a prisoner, than the calling home of one who had been banished, than the putting an end to the miseries and afflictions of a mortal life, and the giving a man a passport to a much better world.

This will be the consequence of a true Christian faith, supported by an holy life. And this, I persuade myself, is the happy condition of our deceased friend.

Some perhaps, would take it ill, that a person of so private a life and character should be proposed as an example and pattern to those of her sex.

I would only desire such as think so, at their return home, to read the last chapter of the Proverbs of Solomon. There they will find the character, the praise, and properties of a good wife.

And they that were acquainted with this good woman will be surprised and pleased with the very many singular instances in which she exactly followed the pattern there set her.

Would to God the age would bear to be advised to follow that pattern so well as she has done!

Let us now return to ourselves, and seriously consider, that we are in this life in a state of trial; that this trial is for eternity; that our present life is continued to us only that our nature may be mended, and that we may be made capable of that blessedness which we were created for.

Let us farther consider, that we shall rise out of our graves just as we go in, either the objects of God's mercy, or of His wrath; that happy is he whom death finds rich in good works, no matter what his outward condition has been till then; and that miserable, very miserable, must be the condition of that man, whom death overtakes, either doing evil, or doing nothing that he should do.

Believe it, Christians, for a certain truth, that when you come to die, your thoughts will not be: What a figure have I made in the world; how pleasantly have I passed my days; how plentifully have I lived; what pleasures have I enjoyed; what rare friends have I had; what an estate have I gotten; and what wealth do I leave behind me?

No, no. But such as these following will be your dying

SERM. XCVI.

reflections, if you do not stifle them: How have I spent my life; how have I employed my time and my health; how have I improved the talents with which God intrusted me; what good have I done in the world; have I brought up my children in the fear of God; have I been kind and helpful to poor and needy people, according to my ability; have I been true and just in my dealings; have I lived in the fear of God, and worshipped Him both in public and private, according to my ability; and lastly, have I taken pains to be doing something good all my life, pursuant to that sentence of God, passed upon me, and upon every soul of man, whether rich or poor,—"In the sweat of thy face shalt thou eat bread?"

Gen. 3. 19.

These, I say again, will be the thoughts of such as die in their right mind. And to such whose consciences cannot answer for them, that something like this has been the tenor of their past life; to such as have led an *unthoughtful, fearless, useless, sinful* life, and are just going into eternity, what arguments can be thought on to comfort them?

Believe it, believe it, Christians, that when that day comes, the stoutest heart amongst us cannot, without the utmost astonishment, bear the thoughts of being shut out of heaven.

And now, if you have attended to what has been said, you will see reason not to be over-fond of a world and its pleasures, which you must leave so very soon; nor to omit those opportunities that God has put into your power of doing some good in your generation,—those good works which will so very soon stand you in stead, and witness for you, that you have not been an useless part of the creation, an unprofitable servant, whose sentence is already passed, and dreadful to be thought of.

Some are apt to think themselves much overlooked by providence in this world; not considering, that the blessedness of the next world will make them sufficient amends. Others are (as they think) so happy, that they wish never to die. But believe it, my Christian brethren, believe this important truth, which I would leave with you, as never to be

forgot, *that our happiness or misery does not begin till after we are dead.*

May God give us all grace to think of this, with the seriousness of Christians who hope for salvation; that we may die in peace, and rest in hope, and rise in glory, for Jesus Christ's sake. To Whom &c.

SERMON XCVII.

AT THE FUNERAL OF MRS. SUSANNAH MURRAY.

THE TRUE FOUNDATION OF COMFORT ON THE DEATH OF FRIENDS.

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1 Thess. iv. 13, 14.

See Prov. 10. 7; 11. 7; 14. 32; Jer. 18. 12; Ephes. 2. 12; 2 Tim. 1. 12; Heb. 6. 17, 18; 1 Pet. 1. 21; 1 John 3. 3.

I would not have you to be ignorant, brethren, concerning them which are asleep, that ye sorrow not even as others which have no hope. For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so them also which sleep in Jesus (that is, in the faith of Jesus) *will God bring with Him.*

This is the mighty difference which death makes betwixt true Christian believers, and infidels or libertines.

When the first come to die, they are able to say with St. Paul, "I know whom I have believed;" they resign their souls into the hands of God, who is able to keep them; trusting in His mercy, and goodness, and promises, in Jesus Christ, both at the hour of death, and in the day of judgment.

And their friends, which they leave behind them, having hope in their death, consider them as freed from the miseries of *this life*, and as gone to a much better. With which considerations they endeavour to assuage their grief, and to bear with patience and resignation the chastisement which God in His wise and good providence has thought fit to lay upon them, to be sure for their good, if it is not their own fault.

On the other hand, they which have no hope; that is, no knowledge of what must come hereafter, no faith in God's Word; or have not regarded it; these, when death ap-

proaches, are either *stupid*, or *hardened*, or *given over to a reprobate mind*, a mind void of judgment; or, if their consciences are not seared, they are under the greatest perplexities, fears, astonishment, at what may very soon be their portion; and no mortal man can tell what to say to comfort them.

And such friends as they leave behind them are either overwhelmed with sorrow for what may too likely be their lot; or they part with them with despair of ever seeing them again; or they blame themselves for having not done all that was in their power to keep them from the pit of destruction.

So very great a difference does death make, both with regard to the living and the dead, betwixt Christians and infidels, betwixt good and bad livers.

Now, the great design of the subject I have chosen, being to comfort all Christians upon the death of such persons as have been very dear to them; I would from hence take occasion to exhort you all, good Christians, to take care to lay a *sure foundation of comfort* for yourselves, and for those you shall leave behind you.

This is to be done by a TRUE REPENTANCE, and by an HOLY LIFE; these being the fruit and effects of a true and saving faith.

Whoever promises you pardon and peace upon any other terms, does but deceive himself and you, to his own and your eternal ruin.

And yet nothing is more common than to hear people speak their comfortable hopes of their departed friends, though they have lived in sin, and have left no sign of virtue and piety behind them; only because they were become serious at the sight of death, which the most abandoned sinners can hardly choose but be.

St. Paul's commission from Jesus Christ Himself was this: that he should preach (and accordingly he did) every where, *that men should repent and turn to God, and do works meet for repentance.* [Acts 26. 20.]

Here you see, (Christians,) here are works to be done after men have repented. And then, if we add our Saviour's words, THE NIGHT COMETH WHEN NO MAN CAN WORK; we John 9. 4.

SERM. XCVII.

shall easily see what a madness it must be, to trust the great concern of our salvation to a death-bed repentance.

We must not indeed limit the mercies of God, nor discourage people from *confessing* and *detesting* their sins and unfruitfulness, under the means of grace, even at their last moments. But then this is only what can be said to them after all: they having not done works meet for repentance, their case must be left to the uncovenanted mercy of God, who, under the law of Moses, reserved to Himself certain cases, for which no sacrifices were to be offered by His priest.

The will of God is, that all who are called Christians should honour Him in their lives, and should improve the graces He bestows upon them: should crucify the flesh with its affections and lusts, "that they may be meet to be partakers of the inheritance with the saints in light." [Col. 1. 12.]

And if people will deceive themselves either with the bare name of Christians, or will depend upon a faith, which does not purify the heart, or trust the care of their souls to those they leave behind them, they will run the greatest hazard of being shut out of paradise when they die.

To prevent this as much as possible, *and that we may all have comfort in the death of our friends,* I would apply myself,

First; to such of my own order as hear me, and to whom Jesus Christ has committed the care of the souls which He has purchased with His most precious blood;

And *secondly;* to such as have any manner of authority over others, whether *magistrates, parents,* or *masters,* who all have it in *charge,* and, through the blessing of God, in their *power,* to hinder people from ruining themselves and others; to the sad sorrow and grief of those who have any serious concern for their friends' everlasting welfare.

And *first;* every clergyman, who knows what a frightful and difficult part of his duty it is to deal with HABITUAL SINNERS upon the bed of sickness, should be at any pains to prevent so afflicting and uneasy a work; and which only can be prevented by dealing with such people very often and plainly, while they are in health; by representing to them the danger they are in, while they live in open rebellion against God, and in defiance of His laws; that as sure as

there is a righteous and omnipotent God, He will punish them for the abuse of His good creatures, for defiling their own bodies, which at their baptism were made temples of the Holy Ghost, for tempting others to sin, and being accessory to their eternal ruin, for misspending that very time which God has given them in which to work out their salvation, for the evil example they give, or for leading an idle and an unprofitable life; and that all this while they are under the displeasure of a God who can destroy both body and soul in hell.

By doing this often, a pastor will keep the fears and consciences of such sinners awake. They will at least sin with uneasiness; and, finding that the ways of sin are *a state of real slavery*, they may at last resolve to seek for that ease and peace, which is only to be found in the ways of God's commandments.

After this, a faithful pastor will endeavour to drive such sinners from all their holds of false hopes, and vain purposes OF REPENTING TIME ENOUGH BEFORE THEY DIE, as if sinners could repent when they please; or as if, by deferring their repentance, they might not at last provoke God to give them over to a reprobate mind.

He will convince them, that they have no reason to depend upon the mercy of God, if it does not lead them to repentance; and that there is certainly the greatest evil towards *that man*, who sins and prospers in his sin, it being a sign of God's greatest displeasure, and that such a man is left to himself: a condition the most to be dreaded of any thing in this world.

That, notwithstanding all this, if a sinner is truly sensible of his sad condition, in having been in the hands, and power, and a slave to Satan, and desires to return to God and to his duty, he ought to be assured, that *that* desire is from the good Spirit of God; and if he closes with it, God will receive him into favour upon his true repentance.

We have the word of the Son of God for it: "VERILY, ALL SINS SHALL BE FORGIVEN UNTO THE SONS OF MEN;" to encourage the greatest sinners to apply to God for mercy and pardon, and not to defer doing so one moment. Mark 3. 28.

If to this, a faithful pastor would add his own most earnest

SERM. XCVII.

prayers in behalf of such sinners; beseeching God, over and over again, to touch their hearts most powerfully from above; to take from them all that obstinacy and blindness which hinders their conversion; he would not so often have reason to be concerned and sorrowful for so many of his flock, nor repeat those words *in the office for the dead* with a *sad heart* and *doubtful mind*, "that we may rest in Christ, as our hope is this our brother does."

At least, a pastor will have the comfort of having done his duty, and that the blood of those that perish will not be required at his hands.

But there are another sort of people, though not such profligate sinners, who are yet in the way of perdition, and which a pastor ought to make them sensible of, lest he mourn at the last, when it may be too late to recover them. And these are, such FORMAL CHRISTIANS AS HOLD THE TRUTH IN UNRIGHTEOUSNESS; who perform the common duties of Christianity without concern to do them well, or without being bettered by them; who profess to believe in God, without fearing to offend Him, and in Jesus Christ, without feeling the necessity of a Redeemer.

In short, who hope to go to heaven when they die, with the indifference of one who never considers THAT WITHOUT HOLINESS NO MAN MUST SEE THE LORD.

[Heb. 12. 14.]

Such *formal, indifferent, thoughtless* Christians should be made sensible of the absolute necessity of an *inward conversion* of the soul to God, as well as of an *outward religion.*

And as *an outward religion* is not, at our peril, to be neglected, being ordained to honour God, and to create and keep in our hearts a lively sense of His majesty, and to obtain His graces; so neither is it to be depended upon, unless it lead us to love God with all our soul, and to keep His commands, in order to restore us to the image of God in which we were created, and without which we must never hope to go to heaven.

A pastor, who does this faithfully, will have no reason to *sorrow as those that have no hope for such of his flock as sleep in Christ.*

The next who are most capable of laying a good founda-

tion of comfort and happiness both for the *dead* and the *living*, are *Christian parents.*

Most parents are concerned for their children's present well-being; and too often forfeit a good conscience rather than not provide for them; while too few are careful to give them such instructions, and such examples, as, by the grace of God, might secure them an inheritance in heaven when they die.

And so it comes to pass, that, instead of comfort, they often have the torment, the *sorrow*, of seeing them in the way of ruin while they live, and of misery when they die.

And although this cannot always be helped, even by the most sober parents, yet they ought not, at the peril of their own souls, to neglect all that is in their power; namely, to see they be instructed in the principles of the Christian religion, to pray for them every day of their lives, and to be sure that they pray for themselves; and to take great care that their natural corruption be not strengthened and increased by evil examples; that they get not habits of *vanity*, of *idleness*, of *pride*, of *intemperance*, of *lying*, of *fraud*, or of *uncleanness*, under their own eye, or through the examples they themselves set them.

When they are grown up to years of discretion, they should be brought to the ordinances of religion, and made to understand them; to *Confirmation*, and to the *Lord's Supper*; that once understanding the promises and threatenings of the Gospel, they may not fall into sin without the checks of conscience, and a fear for themselves.

And when parents are providing for their children, the Wise Man's maxim should be always before their eyes: "Better is a little with righteousness," that is, honestly gotten, "than great revenues without right." Remembering, that when a canker goes with a portion or an inheritance, it is generally the ruin of whole families. [Prov. 16. 8.]

Lastly; such parents as *squander away their inheritance* should seriously consider, (if such people ever do consider any thing,) that they tempt their children to curse their memory, and to imitate (as far as they leave it in their power) and follow their extravagant ways; and, which

SERM. XCVII.

will still be the conclusion, they will have no comfort in them, living or dying.

On the other hand; where people live in the faith and fear of God, whether they live or die, their friends find motives of comfort in them.

If they are in pain of body, or under affliction of any kind, they comfort themselves with this certain truth, "that whom the Lord loveth, He chasteneth; and scourgeth every son whom He receiveth;" and that afflictions are more a sign of God's love, than of His anger.

[Heb. 12. 6.]

Afflictions, indeed, bring us the nearest way to God. Even death itself, the greatest seeming affliction to human nature, is a sure passage to a much better life and world than this we are in, if it has not been entirely our own fault.

Would you then strip death, with all the train of afflictions leading to it, would you strip them of all their terrors, then look on it in this view: as it is a sacrifice for sin, which God will mercifully accept of, in union with that of Jesus Christ, if we prepare for it, and submit to it as a penance due to our offences.

In this view, death is only the deliverance of a prisoner, the recalling of one from banishment, the end of all miseries, and a passage to another world.

With these considerations, good Christians will comfort their souls upon the bed of sickness.

But how shall we comfort those who *feel*, who *smart* under, the loss of their departed friends?

We must ever despair of doing it by such arguments as human reason may suggest. And indeed we do not want them, since God in His holy Word has furnished us with so many and more effectual.

[ver. 18.]

COMFORT ONE ANOTHER WITH THESE WORDS, saith St. Paul, in the close of this chapter. What are these words? Why, with the assurance, the infallible assurance which God has given us, THAT SUCH AS SLEEP IN JESUS ARE HAPPY beyond what we can imagine or describe; that they are out of all manner of danger of ever miscarrying; and that, if we endeavour to follow their good examples, we shall meet them (and that very soon) in peace and happiness which will never end.

Now, that this is the happy condition of her whose remains lie before us, they, who are most apt to bewail their loss, have all the reason in the world to know and believe it assuredly.

They know how well she answered the character of a prudent wife, of a careful tender mother, of a kind mistress of a family, of a good and charitable neighbour, and with what prudence and piety she has governed her children and family.

She had from a child been bred up in the fear of God; and when she became a mother of children, it was the great concern of her life to make a grateful return to God for that mercy, by endeavouring to bring up her own children after the same godly manner.

If we consider her loss in this view: what she was, how she lived, and what she now is; it will lead the most sorrowful of her relations to bless God for His mercies and graces vouchsafed unto her while she lived, and for the good use she made of them; and to endeavour, as far as human nature will suffer them, to resign *their will* to the *will of God*, who never did, never will deprive His servants of any thing in this world, but when He sees it will be for our good, if we resist not His will.

Nay, we may venture to say, that He deprives us of nothing but what in His infinite wisdom He sees would make us more unhappy.

This will be acknowledged by every body who knows (and who does not?) that the very best of men do stand in need of warning to consider their latter end; to remember that this is not the world they were made for; to lay up their treasure in heaven betimes, that their hearts may be there before they die; that they want very strong motives to wean their hearts from a world which they are apt to be too fond of, and which yet they must leave very soon.

And lastly; most Christians want to be endued with such habits of patience and resignation to the will of God, as may render death, with all the miseries that generally lead to it, less frightful and amazing. And nothing sure so proper to effect these good ends, as such mournful occasions as this before us.

SERM. XCVII.

But such providences as these are very proper to instruct and edify others as well as those that are most nearly concerned in her loss.

Here is a person taken away, who wanted no worldly comfort that her heart could wish (if any worldly thing could have satisfied her). Beloved by her *husband,* by her *children,* by her *friends.*

Will any body, who considers this as they should do, set their heart upon so vain, so slippery, so uncertain a world, and its satisfactions?

But then, observe the power of grace, which, in the midst of all these enjoyments, could make her think of leaving them, as indeed she did, with great resignation, in hopes of a better inheritance.

You see, my brethren, the mighty power of a true Christian faith, and that it enables us to find comfort, and even satisfaction, in the greatest temporal evils; that it renders death itself, the very king of terrors, far from being frightful to such as die in the Lord; and is so far from depriving those that survive of all comfort, that it fills their souls with joy for the well-grounded hopes it gives them of the happy state their friends are in.

Be persuaded, therefore, good Christians, to leave your friends this comfortable legacy, when you die: namely, the comfort, the sure and certain hope, that you are going to a place of *rest,* and *peace,* and *happiness,* where you will be out of the reach of trouble, of temptations, and of danger, and out of a possibility of displeasing God any more.

This we hope, we are verily persuaded, is the case of our departed sister and friend; for we may very truly reason, as the wife of Manoah did with her husband, when he cried out for fear, "We shall surely die, because we have seen God." "If the Lord," said she, "were pleased to kill us, He would not have received a burnt-offering at our hands, neither would He have shewed us all these things," all these favours.

Judges 13. 23.

Even so we reason: if God gives His children grace to hearken to those that are ordained to instruct them; if He opens their ear to discipline, and they are obedient to the heavenly call; if He gives them opportunities of doing good in their generation, and grace to make use of them; if they

submit to His fatherly chastisements, and are bettered by them, as becomes the dutiful children of so good and kind a Father. All these are sure grounds for a Christian to hope that these graces have not been given in vain; but that God designs, and will crown them with pardon, favour, and happiness eternal.

This, we say, is the comfort of all God's servants, whether of those that die, or of those that lament the loss of their dear friends.

On the other hand; with what a sad and heavy heart must they leave the world, who, looking back, can see nothing in their whole life, but what must render them unworthy of the mercy of God; who have lived an idle, useless, careless life, and are cut off in their sins; who are going to appear before a Judge, whose laws they have broken, whose graces and favours they have set at nought; who have done little or no good in their generation.

What sorrowful dying thoughts must such people have! what little comfort and hope will their surviving friends have!

But this is a subject too foreign and too mournful to be insisted on, upon this occasion. I only hint it, that such as have any degree of seriousness may think in time, and to some good purpose, what an ill-spent life must end in.

As to our sister and friend, we hope, and we believe, that none of the graces which God vouchsafed her, were lost upon her; that she died in the true faith and fear of God, after a well-spent life; that she is gone to appear before a Judge, whom she endeavoured, by a sober and useful life, to make her friend; and that she is happier, where she now is, than ever she was in this world.

May we all bless God for such good examples, and endeavour to imitate them, that we may one day meet in the paradise of God, and be made partakers of a blessed resurrection, for the Lord Jesus' sake. To Whom, with the Father and the Holy Spirit, be all honour and glory, now and for ever. Amen.

SERMON XCVIII.

PREACHED AT THE FUNERAL OF THE REV. THOMAS ALLEN, VICAR OF KIRK-MAUGHOLD.

THE PROPER DUTY OF CHRISTIANS IN GENERAL, AND OF THE MINISTERS OF CHRIST IN PARTICULAR.

JOHN xvii. 4.

I have finished the work which Thou gavest me to do.

THESE are some of the last words of our blessed Saviour, and spoken just before He laid down His life for us. As He was man, He had a work given Him by God to do, and to finish, before He should leave this world.

It was to make known the will of God to fallen man, that God would be reconciled to men upon certain conditions, which He had declared to them. And especially He was to make known to them, that God would call all men to an account, and adjudge them to happiness or misery, according to the works done in the body. This work our Lord declares He had finished; and makes it the subject of His rejoicing before His death.

Now, although the best of men come infinitely short of this pattern, yet every Christian is bound, at the peril of his soul, to strive to come up to it; that is, *to do his duty in that state of life unto which it shall please God to call him.*

And yet this is a matter so seldom laid to heart, *at least so seriously as it ought to be,* that most people look upon their time as their own, to be disposed of as *they* please; and that they are at liberty to choose what work pleases themselves, not what the providence of God had given them to do.

So that the account men are to give of the work they have done, is too often the least and last of their thoughts. And

yet all Christians own, that upon this depends their everlasting happiness or misery.

And every Christian, as he hopes to die in peace, and in the favour of God, as he hopes for heaven, ought to live so, as that when he comes to die he may be able to say, "*I have finished the work which Thou gavest me to do;*" that is, according to the allowances made by our merciful God to human frailty, I have been doing my duty, the work which the providence of God appointed me. I was sensible of my own weakness, and therefore I always prayed for His grace and assistance, that I might do my duty so as to please Him. I found myself too often wanting to my duty; and as often as I did so, I begged His pardon, and endeavoured to amend where I had done amiss. And this has been my constant care.

Whoever cannot say something like this to himself when he comes to die, will certainly die either with a *seared*, or an *uneasy* conscience.

I do not say this, to *terrify* any sincere soul, who, though late, has repented of his *unprofitable* or *idle* way of living; and is now working out his salvation with fear and trembling. If his repentance be sincere, that is, if he is bringing forth fruits meet for repentance, answerable to amendment of life, he may comfort himself with the assurance of mercy, and pardon, and happiness.

But what I aim at is, to awaken such sinners as are manifestly in the way of perdition, and not to suffer them to go on without shewing them their danger and their ruin. Such, for instance, as never think of the account they are to give, never mind their salvation, put off their repentance and conversion from time to time, till it may be too late to do them any good.

Now, the way I would take to awaken such sinners into a sense of their danger, is this: I would endeavour to convince, (and may the grace of God make my endeavours effectual!) I would, I say, endeavour to convince you *and myself*, of the real danger every Christian is in, *who is not actually doing the work which God has given him to do.*

And this we shall see very plainly, if we will but consider these following truths: that all mankind are under the sen-

SERM. XCVIII.

tence of certain death, ready to be executed at an hour we know not of; that this short and uncertain time allowed us, betwixt the sentence and execution, is to determine our condition to all eternity; because during this time, we have a work appointed us to finish, which, if not done, we shall be treated as wicked, unprofitable servants; that is, "We shall be cast into outer darkness, where there is weeping, and wailing, and gnashing of teeth."

[Matt. 13. 42; 25. 30.]

Now, can any Christian, who believes these truths, (and they are as certain as that God is true,) can any Christian think of these things, and not resolve thus with himself: 'By the grace of God I will endeavour to *know* the work which God has given me to do; and I will set about it with all my might, lest death overtake me before I have finished it?'

Now, to help forward the meditation of every one who is thus disposed, and to open the eyes of such as are not, I will lay before you these following truths, in as plain a manner as I possibly can.

First; *that every Christian has a work to do, and to finish, before he dies.*

Secondly; *that every minister of Christ has, besides the work that is common to all Christians, a very great work upon his hands, for which he is to give a most strict account.*

Lastly; *that both the one and the other must expect to meet with difficulties; but, however, this will not excuse them from that work which God has given them to finish, because their salvation depends upon it.*

Let us first consider, THAT EVERY CHRISTIAN HAS A WORK TO DO, AND EVEN TO FINISH, BEFORE HE DIES.

Since the fall of man, there is no salvation to be had, but by the Cross; by taking pains to make our peace with God, and to get such holy dispositions as are absolutely necessary to fit us for heaven. "Work out your own salvation" (saith the Apostle) "with fear and trembling." This shews Christians very plainly, if they will believe the Spirit of God, that we have not only a *work* upon our hands, but a *work* that will make us very serious before we have finished it.

Phil. 2. 12.

Let us take but a short sight of the particulars which we have to do. We naturally love the world, and we are

obliged to labour hard to loosen the ties which fasten us to it; and yet this we *must* do, if ever we expect to love God, on which depends our salvation.

The very best of us have contracted evil habits, and it will take time, and care, and pains, to get rid of them.

We stand in need of the grace of God, every day of our lives; and as we hope for His grace, His blessing, and protection, we are bound to pray for them.

We every day receive favours from God, and we have no reason to hope for the continuance of them, if we will not be at the pains to thank Him for them.

But this is not all. We have all of us very many enemies to oppose. The *devil*, a very powerful spirit, walking about continually, seeking whom he may devour, finding them off their guard, or from under God's protection. The *world*, a very corrupt world, perpetually tempting us to follow its ways, which infallibly lead to destruction. And lastly; our *own hearts*, if we had no other adversary, would ruin us, without a constant care and watchfulness. In short, the difficulties and dangers of this life are so many, that we need not be at pains to go to hell; for if we do not *strive*, and *pray*, and *take pains*, and *make resistance*, we shall too surely go thither of course.

But then, besides these general duties that belong to all Christians, every condition of life, and every Christian man, woman, or child, have some work peculiar to them, and for the faithful discharge of which they must one day surely answer.

Parents, for example, stand charged, and must answer to God, for the care they have taken of their children: whether they have brought them up in the fear of God; whether they have honestly provided for their necessary support; and have not squandered that away in *idleness*, *luxury*, and *vanity*, which should have been *their* subsistence.

And their *children* no sooner come to years of understanding, but their work grows upon them every day. They must learn their duty; they must strive to preserve their innocency; they must keep out of the way of temptations; they must, as ever they hope to be happy, deny themselves a great many things, which their hearts will hanker after.

SERM. XCVIII.

The *rich* will have enough to do, to watch against pride, and covetousness, and oppression, and sensuality, and many other hurtful lusts, which drown men in destruction and perdition.

And the *poor*, as little as they may think they have to answer for, have their proper duties and proper difficulties to struggle with. To be content with, and even thankful for, their condition, not to endeavour to better it by unjust ways, and so to serve God as to have hopes of an amends hereafter, for what they have wanted here.

In one word; all Christians are accountable for their *time*, for their *talents*, and for the duties of that state of life in which the providence of God has placed them. And such as live (as God knows there are too many such) as if they had nothing in the world to do, but to please themselves in leading an idle and an useless life, will one day find, that it had been better for them that they had never lived, that they had never been born.

I have only touched upon these general duties of all Christians, in order to convince such as have any degree of seriousness, that Christianity is not a state of idleness; but that every one who hopes for salvation (and who is there that does not?) is bound to look about him, to consider seriously, what he came into the world for, what he is doing, and what will be expected from him when he dies?

But that which I chiefly aim at in this discourse is, to take an occasion, from this solemn meeting, where one of our brethren lies dead before us, and a good many more are present, to put the living in mind of their proper duty, and of the account they must give when it comes to be with us as it is with our deceased brother. And in doing this, I shall hope to instruct every one that hears and understands me in some important part of their duty.

Our BLESSED LORD, whose dying words I have chosen for the subject of this discourse—*His* great work on earth was to establish the Christian religion; that is, to put mankind into a way of salvation. In order to this, He took our nature upon Him, He taught us what things are most pleasing to God, and what God expected from us in order to qualify us for heaven and happiness.

He shewed us what things we should chiefly set our hearts on, and what we should *avoid*, even as death itself. He assured us of the estate of the dead; that some are in paradise, waiting for a blessed resurrection, and others reserved in chains of darkness to the judgment of the great day.

He made known to us the spiritual enemies which we are to watch against, and assured us that God would defend us against all their power and malice, if we prayed to Him for help, and lived like those that expected God to be their defence.

When He had done this, He laid down His life for us, to assure His poor creatures, that God was thoroughly reconciled to all such as would be reconciled to the way of salvation which He had appointed, and close with it.

And then, to confirm our faith and hope in God, He was raised from the dead; and by that instance, He convinced the world of the truth and importance of all His *promises*, *threatenings*, *revelations*, *commands*, and *ordinances*.

This was the work which our Lord said WAS GIVEN HIM TO DO, and which He declares HE HAD FINISHED.

But then, because this work was to be carried on, and made known to all generations of men, as long as the world should last, He therefore *appointed* and *ordained* an *order of men*, whose duty and business it should be, to *publish* and *preach* these glad tidings to all that would receive them; to *pray* for, and *bless* the people in His name, with an assurance, that *their* prayer of faith should certainly be answered, and that *their* blessing should have a real effect, where a Son of peace was disposed to receive it.

But I shall set in order the work of a minister of God, that you may be convinced how much they contribute to your salvation, and that you may esteem them accordingly.

Their power and commission, given by Jesus Christ, is well worth your hearing. You will find it in the 28th chapter of St. Matthew, and it is as follows: Jesus, speaking to His apostles, said unto them, "All power is given unto Me in heaven and in earth. Go ye, therefore, and make disciples unto Me in all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost. Teaching them to observe whatever I have commanded. And lo!"

SERM. XCVIII.

that is, let the world take notice of it, "lo, I am with you," that is, with you and your successors, "unto the end of the world."

The Apostles having received *this commission*, for themselves and successors, they immediately set about the work of the ministry, publishing this most comfortable truth, *that God was in Christ reconciling the world unto Himself, not imputing their trespasses unto them;* and that He had committed

2 Cor. 5. 19. unto them, to them and their successors, *the Word of reconciliation*. So that you see very plainly, that your salvation depends, under God, upon the ministry of those whom Jesus Christ has appointed to reconcile men to God.

Jesus Christ knew very well, for He had felt the sad experience of it, to what a perverse world He sent them. He knew likewise, that they were men of like passions and infirmities with those to whom He sent them. And therefore, to secure them as much as possible from contempt, and to oblige all men to hear them with reverence, He declares, that He will look upon Himself as injured in the contempt any

Luke 10. 16. man shews *His* ministers: "He that despiseth you, despiseth Me; and He that despiseth Me, despiseth Him that sent Me."

We now come to consider in what their work consists.

And *first*, as stewards over the household of God, their business is to receive into His family, by the Sacrament of Baptism, all such as desire to become members thereof; by which we are put into the way of salvation.

The next is, to convince men, by preaching, that they are sinners; that *as such*, they stand in need of God's mercy, for that a day is coming in which God will call all men to an account, and that their works will be judged good or evil, as they agree with, or are contrary to the Gospel.

Therefore, another work of the ministry is, *to study the Gospel*, that we may be able to declare what it commands, and what it forbids; to put Christians in mind of their duty, which they are but too apt to forget; to exhort them to follow it, and to rebuke them when they do not; to set before them the terrors of the world to come; and to comfort them with the promises of God in Christ, when they become sensible of their evil estate. What Christian does not see the great blessing of such a ministration!

But this is not all. Christians are subject to sin, and by that to forfeit the favour of God, and to make themselves liable to His justice and displeasure. Jesus Christ, therefore, has ordained a sacrament of reconciliation, and has appointed His ministers the dispensers thereof, to all such as with hearty repentance, and true faith, turn unto God. By which their pardon is sealed, and their graces are increased. Is this a blessing to be despised?

But, besides all this, the ministers of Christ, as the priests under the law, have a *daily* charge upon them. They stand obliged, (and I beseech you, my brethren, to consider this, and lay it to heart,) we stand obliged every one of us, either publicly or in private, to offer unto God *daily*, the prayers of the Church, every pastor for his own flock; to confess our own sins and the sins of the people, to give God thanks for the mercies which He bestows upon them, and to beg God's protection and blessing upon them and upon their labours. That as they labour for us, so should we pray daily for them; and that all such as by reason of distance, through necessity, or worldly business, are hindered from coming to Church to pray for themselves, might depend upon the blessing of God prayed for by God's minister.

And, as they must be people of a very profane spirit, who do not esteem this a very great blessing, so must that minister be who neglects it.

Whatever little esteem the generality of Christians may have for the work of the ministry, while they are in health, and at ease, yet when they are visited with sickness, or any grievous affliction, if they have any concern for their souls, they will see the need and the blessing of a faithful pastor, to support their dejected spirits, to direct them how to bear, and how to profit by their sufferings; to examine the sincerity and the faith of dying penitents; and, if he finds them truly such, to give them absolution, which the Spirit of God assures us shall have a real effect: "If he have committed sins, they shall be forgiven him." James 5. 15.

In one word; the ministers of the Gospel, and the ordinances to them intrusted, are the ordinary means by which God does *teach, edify, bless,* and *save* His elect.

And although God can dispense with His own ordinances

SERM. XCVIII.

when He thinks fit, and save a sincere soul without them; yet it is most sure, He will never save that man who despiseth His ordinances, or wilfully neglects to make use of them, although administered by men of like passions with Himself.

I will only mention one other great blessing of a standing ministry. YE (saith our Saviour) ARE THE SALT OF THE EARTH; that is, ye are designed to preserve the world, as much as possible, from corruption, as salt does other bodies; and by that means prevent the judgments of God from falling upon them.

[Matt. 5. 13.]

And it is most certain, (I wish we had not too sad a proof of it amongst ourselves,) it is most certain, that the more the ministers of God are despised, and the ordinances of God neglected; where Church discipline is either contemned or discountenanced, there iniquity will abound, the kingdom of Satan will be re-established, and, as sure as we live, judgments will follow.

Thus I have set before you some of the many blessings, as well as the works, of a minister of God. It is true, these blessings will be more visible, if every minister of God would faithfully perform what his duty requires of him, and what he solemnly promised at his ordination.

But then consider, good Christians, that the personal failings of men do not make void the commission they have received from God. Even a civil magistrate, in things lawful, is to be obeyed, because he has authority from above, though he should not be regular in his private life. It is the commission, the power, the business he is sent about, and the authority that sends him, which we are to look at, and not at the failings of the man.

Be assured of it, therefore, Christians, if you, on your part, do not hinder God's graces and blessings from falling upon you, God will certainly vouchsafe them to you upon the prayers of His own ministers, and through the ordinances by them administered.

'Do not,' saith Maimonides, 'say, what availeth the blessing of this simple priest; for the blessing does not depend upon him, but upon the most holy God, who has ordained him to bless you.'

You see, therefore, the great profaneness of those, who go about to prostitute the ordinances of God, by making them the common business of all Christians.

Well then, if the minister of God does, with a real effect, bless all those that are disposed to receive His blessing, and repair to the Church to receive it; how unhappy are they, who, *for their sins,* are shut out of the Church, as well as they who deprive themselves of the blessing of God, by wilfully absenting from the public ordinances.

Little do Christians consider what they lose by doing so.

You have seen, good Christians, our work and our burden. You are, or may be, partakers of the blessings of our ministrations. Let us beseech you, not to add to our burden, which is great enough, God knows, if we perform it as we should do; do not add to our trouble, by despising our ministry, or make it useless to yourselves, by your ungodly lives.

When you remember, that we are Christ's ministers, remember also that the Master is always dishonoured when His servants are slighted.

It has always been the devil's aim, to discountenance, by his agents, the ministers of the Gospel; he knowing very well, that as bad as the world is, it would be ten times worse, if there were none to stand in the gap, none to tell men their duty, none to keep up order and discipline.

Suffer yourselves, Christian brethren, to be *instructed,* to be *admonished,* to be *reproved,* by those that are in Christ's stead. And if any of you should have the misfortune to fall into sins inconsistent with Christianity and salvation, suffer yourselves to be *reformed* by godly discipline; and bless God that He has appointed a sure way, if it is not your own faults, of restoring you to peace and pardon.

And if the duties of Christianity, or the difficulties of our proper callings, affright us, let us call to mind that Scripture question, "Who can dwell with everlasting burnings?" and [Is. 33. 14.] all the difficulties we fear will vanish.

In short, this is the time in which we are to choose what we are to be, and where we must be, to all eternity.

Christians may flatter themselves, that their salvation is in their own hands; and that they can make their peace

SERM. XCVIII.

with God when they please. They will find to their cost that they have a work to do, and to finish, even before they come to die.

It is an exceeding great comfort to the serious part of the living, when they can lay their dead friends in the grave, in sure and certain hopes of a blessed resurrection.

And blessed be God, that this is the case before us. This good man's *life*, as a Christian, has been *unblameable;* as a pastor, for threescore years, *laborious* and *exemplary;* always *resident* upon his cure, always contented with his condition, and never eager to increase his work and his burden, at the hazard of his soul.

But his life, his virtues, and his character, are so well known, not only to this congregation, but to this whole land, that I shall not injure his memory by recounting only a part of them.

One would only wish and hope, (if the evil tempers and times we are fallen into did not discourage us from hoping for it,) that he may have many followers, as a *Christian*, as a *minister of Christ*, as a *neighbour*, and as a *friend;* in all which capacities, he has most worthily discharged himself.

And now, his good name and his good works do follow him; and all we must follow him very soon, either with or without these witnesses of our behaviour in this world.

I have but one word or two more to add. First, to you, *my brethren;* and it is to put you, and myself, in mind of a truth which we shall all believe when we come to die; that is, that our final sentence will, in a great measure, depend upon the *faithful discharge of our ministry*. What is our hope, saith St. Paul, "What is our hope, or joy, or crown, or rejoicing? Are not ye in the presence of our Lord Jesus Christ at His coming;" that is, all the hope we shall then have, of our being accepted of God, is this,—that we have faithfully discharged our duty to the flock over which the Holy Ghost hath made us overseers. The care of our flocks must be our glory or our shame, our crown or our condemnation.

1 Thess. 2. 19.

And with you, good Christians, who are our flock, I would leave this wholesome admonition of the Apostle; "We beseech you, brethren, to know," that is, acknow-

1 Thess. 5. 12.

edge, "those which labour among you, and are over you in the Lord, and admonish you; and to esteem them very highly for their works' sake;" for it is *they* that must give an account; that they may do it with joy, and not with grief. for that will be no profit to you.

The good Lord grant that we may all so live, as that we may die in peace, and rest in hope, and rise in glory; for the Lord Jesus' sake. To Whom, &c.

SERMON XCIX.

PREACHED AT THE FUNERAL OF THE REV. DR. WALKER, VICAR-GENERAL, AND RECTOR OF BALLAUGH.

ST. PAUL'S COMFORT IN THE PROSPECT OF DEATH APPLICABLE TO EVERY FAITHFUL MINISTER OF CHRIST.

PHIL. i. 21.

For to me to live is Christ; and to die is gain.

See Acts 20. 26; 2 Tim. 4. 8; 1 Thess. 2. 19; Phil. 2. 16.

THAT is, to me, the motive I have to desire to live is the service of Christ; but to die in His service would be my greatest gain.

St. Paul shews, in these words, what a most comfortable prospect of death he had; that he was well assured he should be a gainer by it. He was ready and willing either to live or die, as it should be most for the glory of God and the good of his flock.

It will be well worth our pains to enquire,

First, upon what foundation this assurance of St. Paul was founded.

And, *secondly*, whether every minister of Christ may not be able to say the same thing, and with some reasonable assurance, if it is not his own fault.

I. We will first enquire, *upon what foundation this comfortable assurance of St. Paul was built.*

And, in the first place, he himself tells us long before this, what was his greatest comfort in life: "I have lived in all good conscience before God unto this day;" that is, I ever sincerely followed the judgment of my conscience; I always acted according to the best light I had.

Acts 23. 1.

When I was a Jew; when I persecuted the Church of Christ; "When I did many things contrary to the name of

[Acts 26. 9.]

Jesus," I did it through a firm persuasion that it was my duty to do so.

Why, will this justify any one who follows the judgment of a wrong-informed conscience? No, by no means: St. Paul himself tells us it will not. But he tells us, at the same time, *that he obtained mercy*, even the grace of conversion; because what he had done amiss, he did it, not against knowledge, but ignorantly. 1 Tim. 1. 13.

From whence we learn, what a dreadful thing it is, to act against knowledge and conscience; that such are entirely out of the way of conversion, and are too often forsaken of God, and given over to a reprobate mind.

Whereas such as *act uprightly* are objects of the divine mercy, as St. Paul was, who, through God's grace, became an instrument of the greatest good to the world, and at the same time to himself, so as to be able to say, TO ME TO DIE IS GAIN.

That which makes the sight of death uneasy to flesh and blood, and frightful to others, makes it to *me* easy and comfortable, and even to be chosen and wished for.

What that was, we now come to consider. He was in the first place, A SINCERE LOVER OF GOD, AND A LOVER OF SOULS.

We have the fullest instances of this in the account of his life, and in the several epistles he wrote: where he is ever and anon expressing his love and gratitude to God for the favours He had vouchsafed himself, and the Church through his means. "I thank Christ Jesus the Lord, who hath enabled me, for that He counted me faithful, putting me into the ministry." 1 Tim. 1. 12.

And this, by the way, was the very first subject which this worthy person, and imitator of St. Paul, preached upon, when he entered into holy orders; ascribing to God his *ability*, his *vocation* to the ministry, and all his holy purposes and resolutions to discharge his duty faithfully.

How faithfully he performed this, will be better understood by the loss his flock will have of him, than by any words of mine.

To return to St. Paul, and to the other reasons he had, *not to be afraid of dying*. TO ME TO DIE IS GAIN.

SERM. XCIX.

St. Paul might very well say this, when he could make this appeal to his people, and to God: "Ye are witnesses, and God is witness, how holily, and justly, and unblameably, we behaved ourselves amongst you."

1 Thess. 2 10.

This is some comfort for a minister of Christ when he comes to die; when, for instance, he can say with truth, and with this Apostle, "I have kept a conscience void of offence towards God, and towards man."

Acts 24. 16.

When he can say with truth, "I have not shunned to declare unto you the whole counsel of God;" nor have suppressed any Christian truths through *ignorance, sloth, fear,* or *regard for man;* nor have I purchased my own ease, or temporal advantages, at the expense of the truth, or the dignity of my sacred calling.

Acts 20. 27.

When a man can say with truth, as the Apostle did, "I have wronged no man, I have corrupted no man, I have defrauded no man."

2 Cor. 7. 2.

When he can truly tell the people of his flock, "that without ceasing he makes mention of them in his prayers."

Rom. 1. 9.

That as he prays for a blessing upon his own labours, so he prays for a blessing upon theirs, upon their families, and upon their children.

When a pastor has such a real love for his flock, as that he can truly say with the same Apostle, "Ye are in our heart to live and die with you."

2 Cor. 7. 3.

Such a pastor cannot but hope, that such a love for his flock must recommend him to the love of Christ.

And such, by the way, was the love of your pastor for you, good Christians, of this parish; it was in his heart to live and to die with you.

A good proof of which is now to be seen amongst his papers; namely, a presentation to a very considerable living in Ireland, which was freely sent him, which yet he never would make use of.

This perhaps may not be credited, at least not much minded, by those whose hearts are set upon preferments; who count their flock their own no longer than they can change them for a better, without any visible prospect of being more serviceable to *God,* to *His Church,* or to *the souls of men.*

And yet most surely a time is coming when it will be more satisfaction, more profit to a pastor, to have edified the poorest parish, than to have changed for the richest benefice, without an assurance of doing much more good; which is seldom, I fear, the case.

But to return to St. Paul, and the reasons he had for concluding that his death would be a gain to him.

He was called by Jesus Christ to the ministry. He consulted not with flesh and blood, but was obedient to the heavenly call.

He became a true follower of Jesus Christ, both in his labours, and in his sufferings; and in his contempt of the world, its pleasures, profits, honours, and all its idols.

The opposition which the Gospel met with in every place did not hinder him from preaching it sincerely; and with what wonderful success God was pleased to bless his labours the Christian world is sensible of.

As also with what a steady resolution he exercised the power of discipline committed to him by Jesus Christ, which is manifest from his delivering the incestuous Corinthian to Satan, notwithstanding the countenance he had even from some powerful Christians of that place.

In short; *his manner of life, his faith, long-suffering, charity, patience, persecutions, afflictions, as he himself assures us, were well known to the Church.*

So that he was possessed of all those qualifications which render a man "meet to be partaker of the inheritance of the saints in light." [Col. 1. 12.]

And therefore he might with good assurance say, "There is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, shall give me at that day." 2 Tim. 4. 8.

From all which it appears, that afflictions of any kind are so far from being a sign of God's displeasure, that they are distinguishing marks of His favour, to such as fear Him; that the faithful discharge of the duties of a man's proper state is one of the surest marks of his being in the way to happiness; and lastly, that the troubles we meet with, whether in the way of our duty, or in the way of God's providence, are designed in mercy, to wean us from this world, to make us weary of its corruptions, and that we may desire to repose ourselves in the grave in hopes of a better life.

SERM. XCIX.

This was the case of our friend and brother lying dead before us; whose faith and patience having been exercised with a great variety of trials, and very uncommon, as well as very grievous afflictions; yet he never repined or charged God foolishly, but looked upon them as the effects of His mercy, and saw approaching death with that comfort, and steadiness of mind, that for my part, I wish may be my own case when I come to die.

II. This leads us to the *second particular,* which may be very proper to be enquired into, at this time; namely, *whether every minister of Christ may not (if it is not his own fault) be able to say with St. Paul, and with some reasonable assurance,* TO ME TO DIE IS GAIN.

St. Paul was a man of like passions and infirmities with us; of himself he could do no more towards working out his own salvation, than the weakest of us. He stood in need of, and was supported by the same grace which any of us may have for asking, provided we ask it with the same sincerity, and make use of the graces God has given us.

You have heard what it was which made the prospect of death a comfort to him; namely, an unwearied diligence in the duties of the ministry, out of a principle of love to Christ, and for the souls of men.

Every Christian, as he hopes for heaven when he dies, has a work upon his hands, and is bound to consider seriously what he came into the world for, and what will be expected from him.

But a minister of Christ has others to answer for, as well as himself. And his salvation depends very much upon the salvation of his flock. "What is our hope?" (saith St. Paul) "are not even ye in the person of our Lord Christ at His coming?" [1 Thess. 2. 19.]

I shall, therefore, think this no improper occasion, when one of our brethren lies dead before us, to put the living in mind of their duty, and of the account we must give, when it comes to be with us as it is with him.

Now, the great business of our Lord Christ on earth being to establish the Christian religion; that is, to put mankind into the way of salvation; in order to this, He took our nature upon Him, and made known to us, what God expected from us in order to fit us for heaven and happiness.

He made known to us the condition of the dead: that some are in paradise waiting for an happy resurrection, and that others are reserved in chains of darkness until the judgment of the great day.

He appointed CERTAIN ORDINANCES, as sure means of grace and salvation to all such as should sincerely close with them.

And He appointed an order of men, whose duty and business it should be at the peril of their souls, to administer these ordinances, to publish these glad tidings, and to pray and bless His people in His name.

And as *your* salvation, good Christians, depends (under God) upon the ministry of those whom Jesus Christ has appointed to reconcile men unto God: so, my brethren, you may see plainly, that *our* salvation depends upon a faithful ministration of these ordinances.

That as *stewards* over the household of God, you receive into His family, *by the Sacrament of Baptism,* all such as are prepared to become members thereof:

That as preachers of the Gospel, you endeavour to convince men, that being sinners, they do stand in need of God's mercy and pardon:

That you be instant in season, and out of season, to put your people in mind of their duty, which they are but too apt to forget:

To rebuke them when they do so, and to set before them the terrors of the world to come:

To comfort them with the promises of God in Christ, when they become sensible of their bad estate:

And to administer the sacrament of reconciliation to such, and to such only, as profess with hearty repentance and true faith to turn unto God.

Besides these, we have another very important duty incumbent upon us (and I beseech you to consider it); that is, we stand obliged, every one of us, to offer unto God every day the prayers of the Church, every pastor for his own flock.

To confess his own sins, and the sins of his people, to praise God for the mercies He bestows upon them, and to beg God's protection and blessing upon them, and upon their labours.

SERM. XCIX.

That as they, by their daily labour, do minister to our necessities, so should we pray constantly for them.

And that all such as by reason of *distance*, through *necessity*, or *worldly business*, are hindered from coming to Church, may yet have a share in the blessings prayed for by their own pastor.

In short; every minister of Christ, who hopes to say with St. Paul, TO ME TO DIE IS GAIN, must be able to say with
Acts 20. 26. truth, and with him, I AM CLEAR FROM THE BLOOD OF ALL MEN.

In order to this, he must consider,

That he stands bound and answerable for a certain number of souls committed to his care: to conduct them to eternal happiness, through a very corrupt world, infinite errors, and powerful enemies:

That therefore he is to spare no pains for their good: that he is to preach by his example, as well as by his sermons: that he is to reprove the disorderly with an holy boldness, to awaken the consciences of the careless by the terrors of the Lord, and to comfort dejected penitents by the mercies of God in Jesus Christ: that he is to silence gainsayers by the word of truth: to be *the salt of the earth*, to keep as much as may be his own people from corruption.

In order to this, a good minister of Jesus Christ will find himself obliged to subdue his own passions, in the first place; to lay himself under greater restraints than he would lay others, doing nothing unbecoming the sanctity of his character, lest he lead his flock to hell, instead of conducting them to heaven.

In one word; the ministers of the Gospel, and the ordinances to them intrusted, and by them administered, are the ordinary means by which God does *teach*, *edify*, *bless*, and *save* His elect. And most certain it is, that their reward will be proportionable to their faithful endeavours for the salvation of their flock.

You have heard, good Christians, what our duty and business is. You are, or may be, partakers of the blessings of our ministrations. Do not, for your own sakes, as well as for ours, add to our burden, and to our sorrow, by despising our ministry, or make it useless to yourselves by a profane neglect of the ordinances of God.

Remember, that we are the ministers of Jesus Christ; and at the same time do not forget, that the Master is always dishonoured when His servants are evil treated, or despised.

I have particularly insisted upon *our own duty*, being well assured, that if we fail in *ours*, you will be tempted to fail in *yours*.

And being also confident, that if we faithfully discharge *our* own duty, without any base or bye ends, without fearing the face of man; if we perform the offices of religion with a devotion becoming so holy a work; if our lives are answerable to the truths we are bound to preach, and to press upon others; if we claim no other power or authority over you but what Christ has commanded for your good; if we exercise no other discipline but such as we are directed to do by God's Word, and by the laws of this Church and nation; then we may be confident, that God will accept our persons, and bless our labours, to your edification, and to our own eternal advantage.

And this, as I have the best reason to know, I do, as in the presence of God, affirm, was what our dead friend and brother ever aimed at, and made his constant practice.

He looked upon himself, by his ordination vows, bound to *minister the discipline of Christ as the Lord has commanded, and as this Church and nation have received the same, according to the commandments of God.* [Ordering of Priests.]

He was under the obligation of another solemn oath, *as one of the council of this land, to the best of his power, to defend and maintain the ancient laws, statutes, and customs, proper and belonging to the isle, and prerogatives due to the heirs thereof.*

He solemnly declared before he died, that, to the best of his understanding, he made these oaths his rule to act by. That he acted according to the best knowledge God had given him, for the honour of God, and the good of this Church and nation.

And they are the worst enemies to themselves, if there are any to be found, who will say that he has not acted with *great integrity* in every branch of his duty, and estate of life; as a most *faithful, painful, tender* pastor of the flock committed to his care; as a most charitable disposer of his own

SERM. XCIX.

and of the Church's incomes; as an uncommon benefactor to his parish, and to his unknown successors; as a most dutiful son to his parents, and bountiful friend to his relations; as a magistrate, entirely free from the least stain of corruption or partiality; as a Christian, of irreproachable morals, and exemplary life and conversation; as a most hospitable entertainer of strangers and persons in distress; and lastly, as a very sincere friend, and most grateful person.

Would to God that every one who attends his funeral, may leave the world with the same fair unstained character! It is the best prayer I can put up for myself, or for those that hear me.

It is an exceeding great comfort to the serious part of the living, when they can commit the bodies of their dead friends to the grave, IN SURE AND CERTAIN HOPES OF A BLESSED RESURRECTION.

And, blessed be God, this is the case before us; as we have just reason to hope for, not only from the judgment of charity, but from his works that follow him, as witnesses of his good life. And all we must follow him very soon, either with or without these testimonies of our good works.

Preserve in us all, O God, a lively sense of the world to come; and grant that we may so live, as that we may, with this our departed brother, die in peace, and rest in hope, and rise in glory, for the Lord Jesus' sake.

To Whom, &c.

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